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Traces of Identity in the Mirror of the Past

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Traces of Identity in the Mirror of the Past

Abstract

The rewriting of history is a prominent trend in contemporary Afrikaans fiction in South Africa. In the debates and discussions on the narrative texts which take historical situations and events as their point of departure, questions about the relevancy of rewriting the past for the present or the future naturally arise. This essay is based on research done in a larger project concerned with mapping the various ways in which Afrikaans narrative texts, novels and short stories published between 1990 and the year 2000, interact with history.¹ This essay focuses on a specific short story 'Our mouth' by P.G. du Plessis² in which aspects of individual and collective identity are investigated by reflecting on the history of three generations of a family against the background of the collective national history.



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Abstract

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Front Cover: 'Fikile Mlotshwa, a comforter for hearings in the Johannesburg area, 29 May 1997'. Photograph by Jillian Edelstein.

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.

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EDITORIAL

It is more than ten years since an issue of *Kunapipi* was devoted to the politics and poetics of South African culture, and during the intervening decade much has changed: but how much has changed and what does that change look like? What does it mean to speak of 'the new dispensation', 'the new South Africa'? Kirsten Holst Petersen begins her introduction to the special issue of 1991 with the remark that,

It is not a revolutionary observation that South Africa is at the crossroads. On the one hand things look good: Mandela is free, the ANC is unbanned, the pass laws have been officially dropped, and a constitutional conference about the final abolishment of the apartheid state and the institution of a new state based on democratic power-sharing is at an advanced stage of planning. On the other side things are not substantially different. The apartheid state is still there, blacks still do not have the vote, and most important of all, the inequality and the resultant appalling living conditions for both blacks and coloureds are still the same. ... In this situation one thing has changed radically: the political discourse. (XIII: 1&2, i)

The apartheid state has been dismantled and the democratic elections of 1994 gave blacks the vote and brought the ANC to power and Nelson Mandela to parliamentary leadership; whether the living conditions for blacks and coloureds has significantly changed I am unqualified to judge, but I am aware that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had and continues to have devastating impact upon the social, political and cultural fabric of a country struggling to create an equitable and humane future for all its people. Yet its current leadership refuses to acknowledge this terrible reality — once again the pain and suffering of so many is effectively denied. Are variations on the theme of the past to be the music of the future? As so many of the contributors to this issue make plain, the dream (or nightmare) of a 'new South Africa' will be as much determined by individual and collective responses to the past as to the reality and potential of its present state. To some degree South Africa would still appear to be 'at the crossroads'.

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be officially handed over to parliament in September of this year — symbolic of a finished chapter perhaps in the annals of South African history — an archive of 'man's inhumanity to man'; but what will have been learnt and what gained? Has the reading and writing of this chapter helped to bring about an 'altered state'? This oblique reference to Kirsten's introduction is not unintentional. Her title, 'An Altered Aesthetics?', signals the importance of the battle over ownership of the word. The discourse of power — of politics and culture — must be multi-vocal, must be collectively owned, if a truly democratic state is to be realised. Issues of voice and language lie at the heart of analysis and debate in 1991 and are no less pertinent in 2002. Similarly, the gendered reference to 'man's inhumanity' is also intentional, for it points to the other dominant focus of this issue — the need to hear and speak the silence of women.

The cover features a photograph of Fikile Mlotshwa, taken by Jillian Edelstein at hearings of the TRC in the Johannesburg area in May 1997. Fikile is not a victim as

such (at least as far as I am aware) — she did not give testimony — but she is a victim to the degree that we all suffer in various degrees the inhumanity of the society in which we live — such a society perpetuates victimhood and creates victims of us all. (I might not be a member of South African society but I am a member of human society and this necessarily implies that the state of South African society has direct impact upon me and my world — no man or woman is an island.) Fikile was a ‘professional comforter’. Her job was to support victims and perpetrators alike through the trial of their testimonies. As explained in the text that accompanies the image in Jillian Edelstein’s photographic record of the TRC,

When victims were overcome with emotion because of the stories they were telling, the comforters would use human contact to support them — stroking them, holding them, providing them with tissues to dry their tears and glasses of water to help them recover.

(*Truth & Lies*, 92)

The job description is clear enough — even mundane — tissues and glasses of water; but what is the reality that lies behind the words so easy to write, so difficult to enact? Fikile’s task was to offer comfort — to sympathise, to empathise — to share the pain, grief and guilt of those who suffered; but Fikile herself is overcome. Looking at the photo one cannot help but ask, ‘who will comfort the comforter?’

The decision to put this image on the cover was not an easy one and to some degree I still feel a sense of discomfort with that decision. Fikile is vulnerable — exposed — eyes closed. We look but she does not look back — does she refuse or is she unable to return that look? Fikile agreed to have this image reproduced, yet in exhibiting Fikile’s vulnerability I ask myself if I have furthered an unacceptable use or even abuse of her humanity? Does she lose her subjectivity under the objectification of our gaze and my discourse upon her image? I know the questions are the ‘right’ questions and demand ‘right’ answers. Knowing all this I still chose this course of action. Why? What is right and what are the rights under threat here? It would seem that in some way Fikile’s humanity is at threat here, but perhaps I am presumptuous, or even arrogant. It might be a better approach to ask why Fikile might have chosen to broadcast the image of her care and her burden. Perhaps she was proud of the role that was asked of her and the role she had chosen — the burden she chose to bear. It is an old truism that a picture speaks a thousand words. The body does not need tongue to speak. Fikile’s image speaks to us directly — it is without allusion or illusion. It is an image that gives powerful voice to the many women who cannot speak their suffering for whatever reason. This ultimately is why I felt it was the right choice to make. Fikile has *chosen* this form of representation — she has *chosen* this mode of speech — and I would willingly aid and abet her choice and her right to speak in the language made available to her. Of the 1991 issue on ‘New Art and Literature from South Africa’, Kirsten concludes,

This book operates in a space beyond apartheid politics, where new lines of opposition are formed and debated. Although the debate is angry, it has moved into a world where ideas and controversies are concerned with ways of seeing, not ways of suppressing. (viii)

So too this issue on 'South African Culture Post-Apartheid' is concerned with ways of seeing and speaking that we might alter the reality of our own lives and the lives of those with whom we share 'this space'.

Putting this issue together has been an exhausting and enlightening process. If, as a number of South Africans have said to me, the 'post-apartheid period' is feared to represent something of a lacuna into which cultural production has fallen and is struggling to recover, this issue proves such a fear to be groundless. I have been impressed by evidence of a creative energy that has clearly risen to meet the demands of a nation 'at the crossroads' and a freedom that is yet to be fully realised. It is a very exciting period in South African history to which the diversity and the focus of contributions to this issue attest. What does/will the 'new South Africa' look like? ... read on But before you do I would like to express my indebtedness and thanks to Margaret Daymond, without whose advice and assistance this issue would have been so much less than it is. The political issue of racial descriptors is one of many, many queries to which she responded with prompt and cogent consideration; in this case I asked what was the appropriate usage of the terms 'Black', 'White' 'Coloured' — lower or upper case, inverted commas or not etc to which she replied,

[It's] tricky as there is no accepted practice. For a long time it was accepted practice to write either 'so-called coloured' (no cap) or 'coloured' (no cap) to indicate refusal of the category as a racial one, i.e. it was a construct of apartheid. Now the practice is changing as coloured people are claiming the once derogatory name as one that they want in order to assert a distinctive history and identity (comparable to black pride). So Zoë Wicomb writes the word without decoration of any kind. And I have followed her example.

In light of this response I elected to eschew an editorial tendency to homogenise and allowed heterogeneity to reign — each contributor must stand by their own politics and their own decision to capitalise or not. I would also offer an apology to Maureen Clark, whose article 'Unmasking Mudrooroo' appeared in the previous issue minus the final paragraph (an editor's pride is always a humble one). Her article can be read in full at the *Kunapipi* website (www.uow.edu.au/arts/kunapipi). Finally, I would conclude this editorial with the epigraph that prefaces the second part of Achmat Dangor's novel, *Bitter Fruit*: 'Since in order to speak, one must first listen/Learn to speak by listening' (Mevlana Celaledin-I Rumi). In reply to a question about the relationship between his writing and the ability to listen, Achmat comments :

It's all of it, it's listening to people around you, it's listening to the past, it's listening to history, it's just watching people speak and interact. Very often South Africans listen with a filter: we hear what we want to hear and not what the person is saying. That's why dialogue in this country is so difficult [...] I really believe in the context of *Bitter Fruit* there was a need, a crying need, for those characters to listen to each other. The only person who really listened was Michael. He listened to each one of the others and even himself [...] he was trying to listen to his own voice telling him the past is not something that you dwell in all the time — you have to move on into the future.

Anne Collett

LUCY VALERIE GRAHAM

‘A Hidden Side to the Story’: Reading Rape in Recent South African Literature

‘It will dawn on them that over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket.’ (David Lurie, in *Disgrace* 110)

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence has had an uneasy relationship with literary representation in South Africa. Portrayals of rape have ambivalent potential, and the stakes are high where rape stories have served the interests of colonialism and apartheid. While it cannot be denied that representations of sexual violation have consolidated certain master narratives in South Africa, it is also true that narratives have been suppressed where these challenge power. Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes, reporting in the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, claim that violence against women remains ‘one of the hidden sides to the story of our past’ (Goldblatt and Meintjes 7).¹

Representations of rape have not been uncommon in post-apartheid literature, as Meg Samuelson points out in her contribution to this issue of *Kunapipi*. South African literary criticism, however, has tended to steer away from analysing rape portrayal, and the topic is under-represented in recent critical anthologies. M.J. Daymond’s *South African Feminisms* (1996) includes one essay about rape in literature, a highly polemical reading, by Josephine Dodd, of J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and Lewis Nkosi’s *Mating Birds*.² Although Rosemary Jolly has examined ‘colonisation, rape and the question of pornographic violence’ in J.M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*, her more recent *Writing South Africa* (1998), co-edited with Derek Attridge, includes nothing on the subject. *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998), edited by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, foregrounds the processes of the TRC and sets out to liberate memory by examining ‘how it happens that certain versions of the past get to be remembered’ (Nuttall and Coetzee 1). Neither the editors nor the contributors, however, seem concerned that processes of history have affected the remembering and/or forgetting of rape stories in South Africa.

Editors of the Spring 2000 publication of *Modern Fiction Studies*, a special issue on ‘South African Fiction After Apartheid’, point out that since 1990, South African literature has confronted ‘the experiential, ethical, and political ambiguities of transition: the tension between memory and amnesia’ (Attwell and Harlow 3). The commentaries discuss topical subjects, including truth-telling and the TRC,

inscriptions of homosexuality, land reform and the pastoral, and murder in South African fiction. Some degree of amnesia, however, prevented the editors and contributors from mentioning that South Africa has the highest reported incidence of rape in the world.

In the past, a preoccupation with the politics of race dominated research on South African literature, deflecting attention from problems of gender as manifest in discourse and representation. As the defeat of apartheid became a reality, more serious attention was given to the relationship between women's and national liberation. In spite of an increasing emphasis on gender issues, however, South African literary criticism has generally overlooked the ways in which rape stories have functioned within the discourse of race, and has neglected to consider the relationship between representations of political and sexual violence.³ While some commentaries pay cursory attention to portrayals of sexual violence in individual texts, only rarely has the complex discursive enmeshment between rape, representation and history been confronted. Gareth Cornwell's examination of the 'black peril' and its social meaning in early twentieth-century literature is one such uncommon undertaking.

South African literature in the twentieth century has not previously been scanned for undercurrents of sexual violence, but portrayals of rape in other contexts have received increasing attention in literary and cultural studies. Research has focused on a diversity of literary periods, contexts and genres, and is often interdisciplinary. Scholars have explored the topic, for instance, in early modern England (Baines, 1998; Daalder, 1997), in the work of Samuel Richardson (Eagleton, 1982), in medieval French literature and law (Gravdal, 1991), in Afro-American writing (Ellmann, 1999), in the book of Judges (Bal, 1986), in Western art (Wolfthal, 2000), in Italian and Spanish romance literature (Zecchi, 1998) and in American mass media (Cuklanz, 1998).

Other colonial and decolonised contexts have also received recent scrutiny. Amina C. Mama's discussion of colonial and contemporary violence against women in Africa (1997) traces sexual violence in the cultures that imposed themselves on the African continent, and maintains that independence from colonial rule does not ensure freedom from gender violence. Nancy Paxton's *Writing Under the Raj* (1998) examines portrayals of rape and race in British India, while Harveen Sachdeva Mann's investigation of 'Woman in Decolonisation' (1998) explores rape in the stories of Saadat Hasan Manto and Mahasweta Devi. Other studies of rape in African literature/orature include work on Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (Elia, 1999), and an examination of gender construction in rape-related English and Yoruba proverbs (Yusuf, 1998).

In 1996, the International Police Organisation (Interpol) reported that South Africa had the highest number of reported rape cases of all countries selected for a survey. The *Victims of Crime Survey* confirmed a similar statistic in 1998 (Hirschowitz 28).⁴ Although there is some debate as to whether the incidence of

violent crime in contemporary South Africa is increasing or decreasing, it cannot be disputed that the country still has levels of sexual violence comparable to those in a war-zone. Gayatri Spivak notes that in the decolonised context the problems facing female bodies are not necessarily addressed:

the event of political independence can automatically be assumed to stand in-between colony and decolonisation as an unexplained good that operates as a reversal ... but ... even within this space, the woman's body is the last instance, it is elsewhere.

(Spivak 97–98)

Her observation, a response to the fate of women in post-independence India as depicted in Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful', has particular relevance to South African literary criticism after apartheid, where eloquent reading strategies have rendered the sexually violated body 'elsewhere'.

BEYOND AMNESIA AND ANAESTHESIA

The issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* mentioned earlier includes an article by Michael Marais, which traces inscriptions of otherness in J.M. Coetzee's novels. The analysis is hinged, via Blanchot and Levinas, on a parallel with the Orpheus/Eurydice encounter in the underworld. Marais mentions that David Lurie's sex with a student in *Disgrace* 'abnegates responsibility and thus betrays the filial bond' (Marais 2000a, 176), but his reading does nothing to suggest that Lurie's rape of Melanie Isaacs is more than an arbitrary example of the denial of 'the Other's transcendence' (179). Tracing parallels in the novel between Lurie's violation of Melanie and the rape of Lurie's daughter, Marais reads these incidents as an 'analogue', an allegory for the 'Orphic encounter' (176).

I suggest the need for vigilance where reading strategies eclipse the significance of suffering within the reader's ambit. In *Rape and Representation*, Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver point out that reading rape requires conscious restoration of the body as site of suffering and violation (Higgins and Silver 4),⁵ and Laura Tanner, in a study of violence and torture in twentieth-century fiction, urges the reader to counter the 'seductive powers of representation' by 'seeing into violence' (Tanner 15). Similarly, South African author J.M. Coetzee has asked, in an interview with David Attwell on 'Autobiography and Confession': 'is representation to be so robbed of power by the endlessly sceptical processes of textualisation that those represented in/by the text ... are to have no power either?' (Coetzee 1992, 248). Coetzee proposes in this interview that the body, with its frailty and suffering, is a counter to the endless scepticism that is a feature of both secular confession and textual analysis. In South Africa particularly, Coetzee emphasises, 'it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body' (248). Looking back on his fiction, the writer professed to see 'a simple ... standard' set up, and 'that standard is the body' (248).

As I see it, ethical responsiveness to rape in fiction requires an equally 'simple' acknowledgement that the society in which the text is produced and circulated is the realm of the corporeal, and that suffering/violated bodies are never far away from the reader. The following incident, from Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, for instance, is chillingly comparable with accounts of sexual violence in present-day South Africa:

The couple begged and pleaded. They explained that the woman had just given birth, and the baby was only a few hours old. But the gangsters showed no mercy. They insisted that the woman come with them. And she did. Not a single one of the other passengers lifted a finger to help. The next day, she was found dead in the veld. The gangsters had taken turns raping her, and had then slit her throat. Toloki knew her story because he had mourned at her funeral. (Mda 98)

Attentiveness to instances of the suffering body, however, requires from the reader two levels of consideration. Firstly, there is a need to recognise the suffering of those affected by sexual violence. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which rape stories, circulated in South Africa, have served to justify racism and legitimise oppression.

In 'The Mote and the Beam', a pamphlet on interracial sex published in 1921, Sol T. Plaatje revealed that the 'black peril', which referred to white fears of the rape of white women by black men, was used to justify the earliest segregation laws in South Africa, which have had disastrous implications for the country's black population in the twentieth century (Plaatje 283). Plaatje claims that this rationalisation was unjust, since the few isolated 'black peril' incidents that took place occurred in the cities, whereas the segregation laws applied mainly to the rural areas. As Charles Van Onselen points out, 'black peril' hysteria reflected white social and economic anxieties rather than actual rape statistics, and Gareth Cornwell, in a study of early twentieth-century literature, concludes that the 'black peril' had much to do with sexual jealousy on the part of the colonisers, and relied on colonial constructions of the 'purity' of white women.

The political deployment of rape narratives, however, has not been limited to the early period of segregation in South Africa. Questioning homophobic undertones in the child-rape scene in Mark Behr's novel, *The Smell of Apples*, for example, Michiel Heyns points out that during the 1980s the apartheid government tried to divert attention from its own abuse of detained children by cracking down on child-molestation. In response to rape in South African literature, I thus propose a dialectical approach that acknowledges the suffering of those who are subjected to sexual abuse, without losing sight of the ways in which certain rape narratives have been exploited for political ends in South African history.

J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE* AND THE ANC'S SUBMISSION TO THE SAHRC

During South Africa's recent Human Rights Commission hearings into racism in the media, the ANC protested that the white media in South Africa have

continued to propagate dishonest stereotypes of black Africans, and that this attitude is exemplified in media reports about crime and rape. Public Enterprises minister Jeff Radebe, who presented the ANC's submission to the SAHRC, conceded that there was nothing racist about making such issues known, but he objected to portrayals which suggested that black men were barbarous rapists. Alluding to J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Radebe proposed that in the novel Coetzee illustrates the ways in which white South Africans still believe in a stereotype of the African as being 'immoral and amoral, savage, violent, disrespectful of private property, incapable of refinement through education and driven by hereditary dark, satanic impulses' (Radebe 125). Whether the ANC accused Coetzee himself of racism is ambiguous, but Radebe claimed:

In this novel J.M. Coetzee represents as brutally as he can the white people's perception of the post-apartheid black man ... without the restraining leash around the neck that the European had been obliged to place in the interests of both the native and society. (124)

Countering the ANC's allusion, which he seems to have regarded as an accusation of racism directed at the novel, Michael Marais proposes that by not reporting her rape, Lucy, in *Disgrace*, rejects the narrative offered to her by a certain history and by her father (Marais 2000b, 27). Unlike the white women whose stories of rape by black men were sensationalised and exploited in South Africa history, the fictional white rape victim in *Disgrace* refuses to report the crime committed against her:

What happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone. (Coetzee 1999, 112)

Certain readers may view Lucy's passivity as indicative of the impotence and abasement of whites in the new South Africa, but Lucy warns that her silence should not be read in terms of 'abstractions', and that it signifies neither collective guilt nor personal salvation (112). As Marais suggests, Lucy's refusal to publicise an account of rape 'in this place at this time' draws attention to the very real and concrete ways in which certain rape narratives in South African history have justified oppressive laws that dispossessed, disenfranchised and acted out upon those defined as racially other.

I find it peculiar, however, that rape as a fact of violence in contemporary South Africa is mentioned neither in the ANC's submission to the SAHRC, nor in Marais' defence of *Disgrace*. If, as Elizabeth Lowry observes, *Disgrace* is '[h]alf campus novel, half anti-pastoral' (Lowry 12) and is set in the post-apartheid context, then it should be acknowledged that the central incident in each narrative setting is an act of rape. Most commentators, however, have refused to engage with this fact and have not noticed that 'intrusions' between body/space of self and other are vital to narrative meaning in the novel, echoing the two major

violations that take place. A succession of 'invasions' begins with David Lurie's harassment of a prostitute, Soraya, who has discontinued their meetings. Lurie pays a detective to track her and telephones her at her home. She insists that he stop harassing her. 'What should a predator expect', Lurie asks himself, 'when he *intrudes* into the vixen's nest, into the home of her cubs' (Coetzee 1999, 10) [emphasis added]. In a lecture on Wordsworth, Book 6 of *The Prelude*, Lurie describes the poet's disappointment upon seeing Mont Blanc:

usurp upon means to intrude upon or encroach upon ... a soulless image, a mere image of the retina, has encroached upon a living thought ... the great archetypes of the mind, pure ideas, find themselves usurped by mere sense-images ... do you really wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your best interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so to keep her alive in her archetypal goddess-like form. (21–22)

In Coetzee's novel, however, there is a critique of this Romantic version of desire, and a warning that veiling the other in sublimity may obscure abuse, and may permit one to abandon ethical responsibility. When Lurie 'usurps upon' Melanie a few pages later, he ignores her protests, since he feels that his actions are inspired by the goddess Aphrodite (25). Lurie's act of intrusion is reciprocated when Melanie's boyfriend disrupts Lurie's lectures (31). After the attack in which Lucy is raped, Lurie describes the house as 'alien, violated' (113), and this is echoed later in the novel when he returns to his own home in Cape Town to find it ransacked.

Although the narrative perspective in *Disgrace* invites a certain amount of critical distance from Lurie, the majority of reviewers of *Disgrace* disappointingly read in sympathy with this character, glossing his sexual encounter with Melanie as a seduction, rather than a rape. Lucy Hughes-Hallett writes that Lurie 'seduces a young female student' (5), and other reviewers represent his abuse of Melanie as an 'affair' (Morris 16; Youngusband 148; Du Preez 18). Overlooking the violation entirely, Albert du Toit explains that the 'affair' between Lurie and Melanie 'blossoms but soon sours' (Du Toit 4).

Although the reader is told that Lurie's encounter with Melanie in her apartment is 'not quite' rape, in fact the narrative perspective is destabilised in this paragraph beginning 'Not rape, not quite that' (16) as the reader is plunged into an ambiguous episode where the distance between narrative voice and focaliser collapses. Melanie says 'no' when Lurie grabs her, she does struggle against him as he picks her up and carries her to the bedroom, and there is an acknowledgement that for her, their intercourse is 'undesired to the core' (25). Each of these details allows for, and even prompts, an interpretation of this encounter as a rape. But what, some might ask, was Melanie doing in his home drinking alcohol before this incident? If she was raped, why does she later seek shelter at his home, and why does she sleep with him again? Since we have no access to Melanie's thoughts,

we cannot know. Deliberately it seems, Coetzee has invited a trial of sorts, where the reader is called upon and must assess whether this incident qualifies as a rape comparable to the rape of Lucy.

Lucy insists that in South Africa, 'in this place, at this time', the violation she has suffered cannot be a public matter (112), and her failure to report the crime to the authorities may represent, as Marais proposes, a rather extreme refusal to play a part in a history of oppression. This does not, however, explain the complete absence of her story in the narrative structure of *Disgrace*. Similarly, the reader never hears Melanie's story, and the accounts of the two women are noteworthy lacunae in each narrative setting. In *Rape and Representation*, Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver propose that reading rape requires attention not only to who speaks, but also to '*who does not speak and why*' (Higgins and Silver 3) [emphasis added].

Is it possible to read the silences of the two rape victims in *Disgrace* outside of a phenomenon of historical silencing?⁶ In spite of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 'women's hearings', there is no doubt that certain fragments of remembered history have had insignificant status in South Africa, and that the climate of public exposure during the hearings failed to create 'a safe space' for women. The Human Rights Watch report on rape and domestic violence in South Africa (1995) observed cases where women were targeted for rape as part of the political conflict (Nowrojee and Manby 21), but Jessie Duarte, a former activist, claims that many women felt they could not say they were raped because 'from the position of the people they worked with that was considered a weakness' (qtd in Goldblatt and Meintjes 11).

In a remarkable parallel with David Lurie's attitude during his disciplinary hearing, Lucy, in *Disgrace*, insists that she has '*the right not to be put on trial*' (Coetzee 1999, 133), and in 'The Harms of Pornography', Coetzee indicts a society where those who have suffered rape and sexual abuse may be perceived as 'disgraced':

The ambivalence of rape victims — particularly outside the West — about seeking redress from the law, and the surprising degree of suspicion or hostility with which the public, even in the West, treats such plaintiffs, indicates that in matters of honor archaic attitudes are far from dead ... the system of justice of the modern state, based on notions of guilt and innocence has not entirely supplanted *the tribunal of public opinion*, based on notions of honour and shame.

(Coetzee 1996, 80) [emphasis added]

When Lurie imagines Lucy's story 'like a stain ... spreading across the district' (Coetzee 1999, 115) he is imagining the 'tribunal of public opinion' that will pass judgment upon her, that will see her as tainted, disgraced. The dilemmas of Lucy and Melanie point to a context where victims are compelled to be silent, and thus collude with perpetrators. Lurie tells Melanie to return to her work, but she stares at him in shock: '*You have cut me off from everyone*, she seems to want to say.

You have made me bear your secret (34). Similarly, Lucy's silence means that her rapists are 'getting away with' their crime (158).⁷

Speaking with female survivors of Partition violence, Veena Das came across 'a zone of silence', or 'a code of silence' in the case of rape stories (34). As Das points out, however, one must be wary where figurative language constructs rape narrative as 'hidden', as waiting to be 'unearthed' by the historiographer. Although some would surmise that it could be heroic to uncover these narratives, Das contends that the stories can be a 'poisonous knowledge', and can damage the lives of those who tell them (34). Even when sexual violence finds representation, this may signify disgrace, provoke further victimisation, or fan the fires of political hate speech. Similarly, Monica Hauser, a doctor working with raped women at *Medica Mondiale* in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, notes that stories told by rape survivors may be sensationalised and reified in literature and media reports, causing further traumatisation.

RESISTANCE TO SILENCING AND APPROPRIATION: LITA MAZIBUKO AND THE LITERATURE OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is recognised as a distinguishing landmark of the new South Africa, and to some extent, it has opened a space for South Africans to reckon with their history, but it is at least conceivable that placing victim's stories for circulation within the public sphere made the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process vulnerable to appropriation and commodification. Compensation for the victims of apartheid was paltry to say the least, and those who came forward had virtually no ownership over their stories. Testimonies of rape in particular exposed victims to stigmatisation and other traumatic experiences.

Thus few women offered accounts of rape before the TRC, and men were reluctant to describe their experiences of sexual abuse as rape. In fact the legal definition of rape in South Africa does not include male rape or anything other than penetrative sexual intercourse where there is an absence of consent from the woman. A number of men who testified before the TRC did, however, refer to anal penetration with objects such as broomsticks (in the hearing which focused on the crimes of Jeffrey Benzien), and to sodomy:

On Robben Island they lined us up, the political prisoners. Then they called the criminal prisoners and invited them: 'Take your pick'. This sodomising happened to to us. (Johnson Mlambo, qtd in Krog, 199).

While women were cast as archetypal victims in the literature generated as TRC hearings progressed, women were generally regarded, and regarded themselves, as secondary victims of apartheid.⁸ Certain structural procedures also made it difficult for victims of sexual violence to testify before the TRC. Rape and torture were included in the Commission's definition of 'gross violations of human rights'

but the three women's hearings, which were held in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, excluded the Eastern Cape, a province where violence during apartheid was particularly brutal, and which has been dubbed 'the rape capital' of post-apartheid South Africa.

The TRC's 'women's hearings' were supposed to guarantee 'a safe space' for women to come forward as female commissioners presided over these hearings, and efforts were made to provide a sympathetic environment for the women who testified. However, the main objective of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was to make testimonies public, was at odds with the concept of 'a safe space'. Many of those who came forward found their stories reproduced, in a sensationalist manner, in newspapers or in Krog's *Country of My Skull*. Although Krog herself was intensely aware of the exploitation involved in turning victim's stories into profit-making publications, this did not prevent her and her editor, Ivan Vladislavic, who worked with her on *Country of My Skull*, from testing the marketability of reported testimonies on 'test readers'. Gillian Anstey, writing for the South African *Sunday Times*, reports:

She and editor Ivan Vladislavic initially had a problem with the mix of testimony and reaction. Each testimony was headed with the name of the witness, the date and the violation, *but the reaction of test readers was to simply skip the testimonies*. So the two decided to edit the headings and integrate her reactions with direct speech for each testimony — as well as noting the inclusion of sighs, sobs and pauses, *to great effect*. (Anstey 28) [emphasis added]

When they had so little to gain, and so much to lose, it is hardly surprising that so few of those who suffered sexual abuse came forward during the TRC hearings.

The testimony of Lita Mazibuko, which did reach the TRC during the women's hearing in Johannesburg (29 July 1997), received little response from this institution. Similarly, in Krog's *Country of my Skull*, Mazibuko's story drops like 'a pebble through water — shallow water: an hour or two in front of the commission, and a page and a half in the book' (Ruden 170). Mazibuko told the Commission that she had been tortured and raped in ANC camps after she was accused of being an informer. For all her interest in the suffering body, Krog is not particularly sympathetic to Mazibuko's case, and does little to counter an inference that Mazibuko is 'nothing more than an ordinary prostitute' (184). Krog does, however, report that Mpumalanga Premier Matthew Phosa allegedly rang Mazibuko before the TRC hearing to persuade her to be silent.

In the week following her testimony, however, Phosa denied speaking to Mazibuko on the telephone. Suggesting that she was a woman of loose morals, Phosa said that she 'must bear the consequences of her loose utterances' (1). Phosa then threatened court action against Mazibuko, and the incident opened up the question of whether testifying before the TRC could make victims vulnerable to defamation charges. Ten days after Mazibuko's testimony, however, the ANC

issued a document in which the party 'noted the apology tendered to ANC member and Mpumalanga Premier Matthew Phosa by Lita Mazibuko' (Mamoepa 1), and Phosa withdrew his defamation suit.

Predictably, Mazibuko's story was seized upon by the white press in an attempt to discredit the ANC. In an article titled 'Apology' to Phosa denied' (8 August 1997), the *Mail and Guardian* reported that Mazibuko had not sought forgiveness from Phosa, and that she had confided to the Kulumani Victim Support that a Pretoria based lawyer, Barry Kotze, had been too busy to take a statement from her, but had drafted an apology on her behalf (Haffajee 6). The *Mail and Guardian* article concludes with a sympathetic description of Mazibuko's impoverished condition and with her plea for compensation before the TRC. In a document issued by the African National Congress but signed (and, it seems, authored) by herself, Mazibuko immediately responded to the effect that she was considering taking legal action against the *Mail and Guardian* for falsely publishing that she communicated with them or with the Kulumani Victim Support (Mazibuko 1).

Following Mazibuko's statement, the editor of the *Mail and Guardian*, Philip Van Niekerk, dedicated an editorial to a piece titled 'The Stench of a Cover-up', in which he used Mazibuko's story to cast doubt upon her credibility and that of the ANC. In Van Niekerk's commentary the sympathetic attitude to Mazibuko is dropped, and, referring to 'the *flavour* of her evidence', the editor proceeds to cite the most sexually explicit and violent extracts from her testimony (33). Van Niekerk then dismisses Mazibuko as 'a person of no great sophistication' who is either 'raving mad' or else lacking in 'confidence and authority' (33). To her credit, and in the face of attempts to shelve her as a prostitute or as an uneducated woman incapable of agency, it would appear that Mazibuko resisted pressures of silencing and appropriation.

CONCLUSION: CONFRONTATIONS IN THE AFTERMATH

As the 1990s drew to a close in South Africa, media coverage of rape and child abuse increased dramatically in the local and national press, culminating in the double page report of *Mail and Guardian* journalist and rape-survivor, Charlene Smith, in April 1999. In an interview with *The Washington Daily News*, Smith claimed that rape is endemic in South African culture, but her comment drew criticism from Thabo Mbeki, who protested that her assumptions were deeply racist. The government's denial of rape as a serious problem in South Africa is unethical and should be condemned, but it is useful to situate Mbeki's objection in relation to a history where rape narrative has been deployed for racist ends. Contrary to suggestions made during the *Daily News* interview with Smith, she is not 'one of the first women to speak out about rape in South Africa' and more significantly, she is not the first white woman raped by a black man to receive extensive media coverage. As Charles van Onselen has demonstrated, sensationalised media accounts of white women raped by black men were

symptoms of the 'black peril' hysteria of the early twentieth century and contributed to oppressive measures against blacks.

On 2 February 1911, for instance, a governess was attacked and raped by an unknown black assailant. Known as 'the Lyndhurst Outrage', the assault was given extensive coverage in the local press, which let loose a torrent of European anxiety. This was followed by a massive police pass-drive against 'houseboys' and a public meeting, which, amongst other measures, demanded the death sentence for attempted rape by black men (Van Onselen 50). One could argue that rerunning the 'black peril' narrative in the post-apartheid media potentially plays into white anxieties, and obscures the fact that most rapes in South Africa are intraracial. Furthermore, in contemporary South Africa black women and children are more likely, statistically, to fall prey to sexual violence. Valerie Smith, responding to the huge public outcry following the rape of a white woman by black youths in New York's Central Park, notes:

During the week of the Central Park rape twenty-eight other first-degree rapes or attempted rapes were reported in New York City. Nearly all the reported rapes involved black women or Latinas. Yet ... most went unnoticed by the public.

(Valerie Smith 286)

Charlene Smith's efforts, as a journalist, to highlight the suffering of those subjected to sexual violation have been commendable, but the question begs: Why, in the post-apartheid period, did it take wide-spread media coverage of the rape of a white woman by a black man to generate public outrage at sexual violence? If the South African government is guilty of overlooking the problem of sexual violence in contemporary South Africa, then South African journalism has yet to examine its complicity in problematic history of rape portrayal. The ANC's reference to *Disgrace* during the SAHRC hearings, the fate of Lita Mazibuko's story, and the Smith/Mbeki confrontation demonstrate the need for critical analyses that both recognise the effects of violence and examine the inferences, assumptions and truth claims implicit in readings of rape in South Africa.

NOTES

- ¹ As Goldblatt and Meintjes maintain, these silences have serious implications for attempts to understand South Africa's history and for dealing with the country's present (Goldblatt and Meintjes, 11).
- ² Protesting against the role of Nkosi and Coetzee in introducing South African writing to the rest of the world, Josephine Dodd claims that these writers pander 'to the prurient expectations of a First-world audience, supplying details of terrorist rape and interracial sexual excitement' (118). Condemning what she sees as a replaying of 'the "women like rape" myth', this critic states that Susan Barton in *Foe* panders to the reader as voyeur (119). In her analysis of Nkosi's *Mating Birds*, Dodd refers to Ndi Sibiya, who has been accused of raping a white woman and has taken up the pen to record his version of events, as 'the black rapist' (125). Along with the judge who presides over

his trial, Dodd has thus already found Sibiya guilty, and unhappily, the vehemence with which she denounces *Mating Birds* brings to mind the image of Susan Barton in Coetzee's *Foe*, who, upon finding Friday seated at Foe/Defoe's writing desk, snatches the pen/phallus (replete with a semen-like drop of black ink at its tip) from him in outrage.

- ³ Various post-colonial critics since Frantz Fanon have stressed the interconnectedness of sexual and political violence, and have drawn attention to the ways in which colonial power has relied on the sexual and bodily humiliation of colonised individuals, even when this violence may not have included rape. Robert Young, recalling a photograph of one 'subject of violence, of colonial degradation, caught at the liminal brink of a gratuitous inhuman death', tells of this naked Algerian man's exposed genitals and expression of 'abject fear, misery and terror', as the man is raised in the arms of four European men who are 'smiling and laughing at the camera, clearly in great spirits ... the boisterous homoerotic play of sportsmen' (ix).
- ⁴ Statistics SA documents that in 1996 the incidence of rape was 119.5 per 100,000 population, and by 1997 this figure had increased to 134 per 100,000 population (Hirschowitz 28) — internationally, crimes are reported as incidence statistics for a particular year, and as per 100,000 of the total population. Statistics SA notes: It is inappropriate to report rape or any other crime in a country simply over a time period, for example 'two women are raped every minute', without taking population size into account. Using this method, China or even the United States with their large populations would have many more rapes per minute than countries with smaller populations such as South Africa. (Hirschowitz 1).
- ⁵ Analysing rape trials in the nineteenth century Cape Colony, Pamela Scully observes that historians examining colonial societies have tended to read sexual violence as a metaphor for, or a register of, tension within colonial culture rather than discussing 'rape as a fact of violence' (Scully 336–67).
- ⁶ Since the 1970s, feminists such as Susan Brownmiller have drawn attention to the erasure of rape in the historical archive. Recently, Monika Hauser, a medical doctor working with *Medica Mondiale* in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo claimed: 'a vast shroud of silence has already covered the raped girls and women. (Hauser 11).
- ⁷ In canonical literary narratives of the West, rape is often depicted as 'unspeakable', as severed from articulation, and literary references to hidden rape stories have always brought into relief the complex relationship between literary silences and the aftermath of actual violation. Although Shakespeare's Lucrece names the one who has raped her, her account does not save her from perceiving herself as 'disgraced', or from ending her life. Philomela, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is raped and has her tongue cut out to prevent her from naming the crime and the perpetrator. She sews her account into a tapestry, thus making it possible for her sister to discover the rapist's identity. In the workings of art, Philomela can convey that which is 'unspeakable' in the realm of life. It is no accident that the names of Melanie and Lucy in *Disgrace* echo those of the two mythological rape victims, highlighting Western artistic traditions where rape has had a troubled relationship to representation.
- ⁸ *Country of My Skull* is dedicated 'to every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips', and from Nomonde Calata's cry, eulogised as 'the beginning of the Truth Commission ... the ultimate sound of what the process is about' (Krog 42), to the

final poem emphasising the soft, feminised organs of speech, a complex enmeshment between gender, voice and victimhood is developed. At crucial moments in *Country of My Skull*, ambivalent and problematic gendered constructions of voice and victimhood thus mediate the process by which oral testimony becomes 'literature'.

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Bodies of Writing: Recovering the Past in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines*

There are remarkable similarities between Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines* which were published in 2000. Both present characters, classified as coloured under the race categories of apartheid, who are compelled to re-examine their past, and both texts set this endeavour in the South Africa of 1990–91 which they represent as a time of euphoria and fear-filled uncertainty. The resistance movements had just been unbanned and leaders released from prison, and an interim constitution was being drawn up so that a government of national unity could oversee the country's first democratic elections in 1994. At the same time, as previously exiled revolutionary groupings re-established themselves in the country, rumours of counter-coups circulated and ordinary people were subjected to a decade of continuing terror as various factions either enforced or resisted change.

These novels also reflect an apparently more reassuring feature of their period of writing — presumably the years just before their publication in 2000. This was the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), hearings in which the role of individual memory in liberation and in nation building was publicly enacted. In their representation of the reception of historical inquiry conducted through personal stories, both novels engage with one of the problematic aspects of the TRC to which Robins (1998) has pointed. He argues that despite its noble purposes, the testimonies that the TRC received were not always reported to the public in their full and painful complexity, and sometimes this was because the agenda of nation building was allowed to re-shape what was being said. For example, during a televised broadcast of a woman's account of how her sister was burned alive on suspicion of being a police informer and of how she had had to identify her sister's sexually mutilated body, the SABC interrupted her evidence with 'a commissioner's call for a minute of silence to salute ... [the dead woman's] heroism and martyrdom'. In this way the sister's 'traumatic memory of the mutilation of ... [a] tortured body' was mis-appropriated into the heroic narrative of a nation in formation (Robins 138). It is in this context of difficult, uncomfortable and dangerous reporting that Wicomb and Boehmer explore the politics of identity in the 1990s; here they situate their protagonists who, as the prospect of nationhood somewhat paradoxically brings both liberation and coercive control, ask themselves 'where do I belong?' and 'to what?'

The choice made by both novelists, of a coloured protagonist through whom to pose these autobiographical questions¹ indicates their judgment that it is in this heterogeneous group of people, established as a racialised category in the interests of white supremacy, that issues of identity will be most telling in a democratising South Africa, but this category contains significant local differences. Wicomb's protagonist in *David's Story* is David Dirkse. He is of Griqua descent, which means that the issue in this novel is ethnicity in relation to his official racial category. The Griquas form part of the Khoisan peoples (historically they are not part of the Bantu-languages group to whom the term 'African' is usually given); furthermore, as Dorothy Driver points out, the 'relation between ... [Griquas] and the more general grouping of "coloured" has been variable and complex'.² In recent years in South Africa, Griqua identity has been used to raise 'questions about ethnic identities felt to have been politically eclipsed in both the old and the new systems' (Driver 2001 216).³ In *Bloodlines*, Boehmer's protagonist is a woman, Dora Makken, who is the granddaughter of an African woman who had a love affair with an Irish soldier who introduces himself as in the 'Transvaal State Artillery' (205)⁴ during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1901, and thus the issue in this novel is the construct of race itself.

Both protagonists explore identity by trying to write, and so re-write, the past, and this is presented as a hazardous project. In *Bloodlines* the dangers are located in the characters' emotional turmoil as they write; in *David's Story* experiential trauma is joined by sharp political danger and by a more philosophical, poststructuralist inquiry into writing; the view of writing that is enlisted is that it is a flawed and deceptive exercise which cannot guarantee access to, or produce, the truth. However, Wicomb's staging of writing should not be understood as primarily philosophical and general in intent because, as I will argue, it so clearly serves certain specifics of time and place which should be kept paramount as we consider both textuality and interpretation. As I have already indicated for the choice of protagonists, the different histories of hybridity in South Africa necessitate this emphasis on the specifics of local history, but, in addition, both the present conjuncture in South Africa and the wider postcolonial politics of culture require that critical reception should give primary place to the author's responses to local conditions in the present and representations of specifics in the past. This emphasis on the local is not to advocate the 'new tribalism' against which Said has warned (1994 21) and nor is it to invoke a local authority of experience and interpretation which would tend to encourage a 'cultural paralysis' (Donne 1) in cross-cultural readers. In discussing the very real problem of 'the legitimacy of readings' in postcolonial criticism, Donnell has positioned this very real problem as affecting metropolitan readers, 'British/European/Western/white readers ... especially across the ex-colonial/postcolonial divide' (103), but the history of South Africa, as a settler colony, ensures that this divide operates at the margin as well as between the margin and the centre — 'native critics' cannot

take refuge in authoritative essentialisms (Donnell 104–105) for they have to grapple with cross-cultural questions too. My approach is rather to insist that the writer's place in, and interpretation of, local history should be made foremost in all equivalently positioned, self-conscious readings so that, as Said has argued for the interaction between margin and centre, there can indeed be 'both a stubborn confrontation and a crossing over in discussion' (1994 34). Criticism must promote this resistant exchange on two fronts. Firstly, and as is now commonly agreed, it needs to prevent texts from the margins being drawn into and 'dominated by powerful cultural interests and capital centred in the First World' (Boehmer 236). Wicomb and Boehmer pose a particularly striking challenge to this tendency in that although they both live cosmopolitan lives away from South Africa, they have chosen to write narratives which are powerfully local rather than reflecting their own migrant or immigrant condition, and in Boehmer's case this has involved imaginative entry into a 'coloured' heritage that is not her own. Secondly, as with the representation of historical recovery in the novels that I am discussing, critical resistance to neo-imperial interests also entails taking care that the cultural and historical specificity of each postcolonial text is not drawn into a postcolonial sameness. Literatures at the margins must be allowed to resist each other, as well as the centre. In this spirit, the aspects of the novels by Boehmer and Wicomb which I will read as responses to local history are (besides the choice of protagonist and the reception of painful reports): the consideration of 'writing' as both a noun and a verb; the status given to historical documents; the use of a narrator figure to raise (or expose) questions of authority and complicity; the embodiment of the politics of identity; and the implications of intertextuality.

In *David's Story*, David Dirkse is an uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cell leader who has been working undercover to establish support for his party (the ANC), particularly among the heterogeneous grouping of people classified as 'coloured'. He is a selfless freedom fighter, 'disciplined' is his word, and yet, for reasons that he is unable to articulate, he takes time off from his dedication to a non-racial future to go to Kokstad in the Eastern Cape to delve into the history of the Griqua people and one of their nineteenth-century leaders, Andrew le Fleur, whose forebear Eduard la Fleur, had emigrated from France. It emerges that he may be the grandson of a natural daughter of Andrew Le Fleur. This man's letters show that he gradually turned away from making common cause with African people over their loss of land to white colonisers and that by 1917 was calling instead for a separate land for a separate folk — apartheid. In 1991, this is dangerous material. While the documents that he finds contradict David's own beliefs that his race is 'of no consequence' (11) in the struggle to establish a unifying freedom, his search itself seems, to the comrades who (we must infer) keep him under surveillance, to imply that he harbours an ethnic separatism which threatens their unity, or, and this is the sinister unspoken, threatens the interests of an emerging African majoritarianism. In a further indication of the dangers to which his actions expose

him, reactionary forces also try to seduce him to their cause. Their attempted bribery takes symbolic intensity when David is offered illegal diamonds, for the Griqua people were systematically denied their claims to diamond-bearing land in the late nineteenth century. From all sides, David's quest puts him in grave danger.

Bloodlines has two protagonists. The first is Anthea Hardy who knows little about the actual fight for freedom until she is pitched suddenly into its effects when her boyfriend is killed by a bomb in a beachfront cafe. She is the daughter of a typical white bourgeois family, but her need to find 'the larger process' (68) in what has happened takes her to the family of the bomber and she gradually compels his reluctant mother, Dora Makken, to explore the family's historical identity. Dora thus becomes the novel's second protagonist and, while *Bloodlines* does not focus on the political dangers of acting alone,⁶ her journey into the past is, like that of David Dirkse, filled with personal anguish. She knows something of the history of her long-dead grandmother, Dollie Makken, but she has shut it out because Dollie's is yet one more story carrying 'the vomity stink of betrayal' (181) that marks the history of coloured people. When Dora first begins to overcome her profound reluctance to look into the past, and to try to write Dollie's story, she does so for instrumental reasons. Anthea persuades her that uncovering the family history might serve to reduce the life sentence that has been imposed on her son, Joe. History might literally set him free. Then this hope is gradually joined by Dora's recognition that she needs to write Dollie into life for her own sake. We are never asked to doubt the results of Dora's writing; as Anthea says, '*Writing... makes things happen after all*' (49 [original italics]).

The danger facing David Dirkse in his enquiries is doubly figured in Wicomb's novel, for inside his own story stands Dulcie as the unacknowledged heart of his quest. She is a fellow revolutionary about whom he is reluctant to think, let alone write or talk, because he believes that to bring her into his narrative would be to admit that 'there is something between them' and this would be to contravene discipline and to 'betray the cause' (137). Thus Dulcie, like David's enquiry into the Griqua past, comes to embody the novel's central socio-political paradox: 'the contradiction between military values and the goal of political freedom' (79). In *Bloodlines*, the problem of means and end is also raised although not as fully; when Joe Makken's bomb explodes it kills innocent bystanders thus clouding his reminder to the state that the unbannings of 1990 have not liberated the oppressed majority, but the desired figure of Dollie Makken is not linked to this contradiction because she is imagined as embodying the history that has to be recovered rather than the problems surrounding the search. Her recovery does not call into question the act of writing itself.

David, unsure in his own mind why he wants to record his history and determined to give away nothing about politically sensitive matters, asks an unnamed woman to be the amanuensis to whom he tells his story, and she soon

notices that Dulcie is a desired but forbidden figure at its centre. David's denials of his desire are necessary to his belief in himself as a soldier, but they conflict with his claim that searching for the truth is synonymous with fighting for freedom (116). The contradiction is one he is unwilling to tackle and consequently Dulcie's obscured meaning renders uncertain any other meanings about the past and the present that may emerge. This radical uncertainty is supported by the thematic, epistemological and structural features of *David's Story*, but because Wicomb uses the profound ambiguity of writing to underscore the very real fears and the personally imposed inhibitions which a freedom fighter who was curious about his ancestry might have experienced in the 1990s, postmodern playfulness is not the immediate outcome. Instead uncertainty and provisionality function as devices that give us access to David's and the narrator's states of mind. A comparable network of reluctance, fear and writing is a more personal matter in *Bloodlines* and does not flow as immediately from a current power struggle or from this novel's representation of writing, and it is not sharpening the difference between these novels too much to suggest that while Boehmer's protagonist is shown to give herself (and maybe her son) renewed life by rewriting the past, Wicomb's novel implies that David's writing is what literally threatens Dulcie's life and ends his own.

Writing as life-giving in *Bloodlines* plays through into the ways in which documentary and other sources are treated in the narration of this novel. Its narrating voice is only a lexical presence which, sometimes, accounts briefly for the historical documents it presents — as when it introduces the first of the letters written by Kathleen Gort, the Irish woman who comes to work in a Red Cross Hospital during the Anglo-Boer War and who meets Dollie Makken in a field hospital, with these words: '*A letter folded into fours is stored undisturbed under the old vellum lining of the odds-and-ends chest that stands on Dora's back stoep*' (61 [original italics]). As there is no explanation of who finds this letter or when, the reader's access to it at this point is privileged and controlled by the narrator — or the implied author who is ordering matter — and our confidence in this writerly control is never seriously disturbed. There are also letters ascribed to W.B. Yeats and to Maud Gonne, which we are told in the 'Acknowledgements' are fictional.⁷ Those from Yeats (written to Mrs Olivia Shakespear) appear entirely without motivation and their reception is unlocated. This momentary masquerade of the fictional as the real could be read as Boehmer's silent acknowledgment of the provisionality of historical documents, but, largely because all of these documents and other mementoes appear providentially at the moment they are most needed to guide the progress of the characters' research, their effect is to invite us to believe that when the right purposes arise then the truth about the past will reveal itself and that the revisioning will be redemptive, 'as if a gap, a wound, is beginning to knit' (187). One of the documents which appear somewhat to order is the journal kept by Kathleen Gort which, we learn later, Anthea has found

in the city archive. It confirms that Dora's father was the love child of Dollie Zwaartman and the Irish soldier, Joseph Macken, and suggests that Dollie herself was probably the grandchild of a white farmer and his African servant. Another kind of confirmatory source turns up while Dora is in Cape Town, trying to bring Dollie's story to closure of some sort. She has gone to be 'alone' (233) with Dollie and she finds, at the end of a harbour quay, a statue dedicated to an Irish soldier lost at sea in 1902. The trust that Dora has already placed in the documents that Anthea has found leads her to believe that she can 'build on [her discovery ... it is] a destination, a point she can move towards and fasten her story on' (249) and she is able to write Dollie's last communication with her now departed lover.

In counterpoint to *Bloodlines*, written documents and the act of writing in *David's Story* are not to be trusted. This is signalled immediately by the narrator's remarks about 'gaps', 'meaning in the margins' and 'absence as an aspect of writing' (2), phrases which David dismisses as 'prattle' (2) and which he later links with her 'liberal bullshit' (197). Thus, against his self-protective wish for simplicity and his attempts to control written production by deciding what he will and will not reveal is ranged her understanding of discursive complexity; out of this comes the textual weave of his words and her voice, not so much David's story as her story of writing the story.⁸ The context in which they are working makes the narrator fairly sympathetic to David's evasiveness: in her Preface she tells us that he was 'simply unable/unwilling to disclose all' (2) and that she accepts the slash which both separates and joins those two words because it bridges the 'mixtures of meaning' (3) which arise in a context when contrary purposes and secret struggles for power can barely be contained, even by silence, but David's evasiveness does drive her to ask him 'what ... is the real subject of your story?' (34) and, when he finds it impossible to answer, this sceptical scribe, in one of the most disturbing of the novel's playful ironies, feels compelled to become the creator of much of David's story, especially of Dulcie's part in it. At one point in her conjectures the narrator's knowledge that she might be imposing coherence on the revolutionaries in their world leads her to wonder whether Dulcie should be narrated only in 'the middle voice', but she dismisses the idea with the joke that it is 'unfashionably linked with the sixties and French letters' (197). Her levity causes David to 'shake his head in disbelief' as he transfers her disrespectful attitude from writing to a struggle that is 'sacred' (197) to him while she persists in the knowledge that 'Dulcie has, after all, always hovered somewhere between fact and fiction' (198). Again and again, *David's Story* ranges the need for political certainty and control against the question of liberty and compels the reader to experience ways in which language itself, especially in its written form, can be made to serve both or, if it is understood as a self-referential system, neither.

In her creation of Dulcie, the image with which the narrator repeatedly confronts David is that of Dulcie's being tortured by unnamed 'men in balaclavas' (81). Guilt, as well as fear, is part of the horror of this scene with its sustained

impossibility of knowing who these men are, so that Dulcie's body in pain comes to represent both an extreme possibility in her relationship with David⁹ and what might happen when a power struggle is working itself out. In both meanings she is shifted from being agent to, simultaneously, victim and trophy. By repeating scenes of this horror, this sexualised torture that the perpetrators say is 'not rape' (178) but is intended as more than rape, the narrator is clearly trying to shock David into speech about Dulcie, (incidentally, her questions are a reminder of the resounding silence around the abuse of women in the TRC hearings) but by now we know that she too is complicit in concealment. Her part in evasion and duplicity has increased as the context in which she is working muddies matters and this is half revealed in her Preface, which by convention is written last but read first. In the last two paragraphs she tells us that 'David has not read all of the manuscript' and that this is 'of some concern' to her because she has not always done what David 'had wanted' (3). (For example she puts 'Nkosi sikilele iAfrica' at the end of the Preface rather than at the end of David's story, as he had requested.) The explanation for her anxiety is buried in the use of a negative and a sly shift in the verb tense from the present perfect, in 'David has not read' (the negative implying 'not yet'), to the simple past, in 'David wanted'. What is half concealed here is that David cannot read the manuscript because he is dead, as we discover on the last pages of the novel. What we also discover at the end is that the narrator's anxieties arise not only because she has taken on the doubt-filled task of writing Dulcie into being; like David's, hers are also specific, local fears which arise from the danger in which her role in writing his story has placed her. In line with our ironised, self-conscious relationship to the text, the bullet which smashes into the narrator's computer at the end can be understood as both playful (a metaphor for the dangers of the constructs of writing) and reportage (an indication of the political reality which has relentlessly shaped the story-telling in which she and David have been occupied).

We also have to second-guess the narrator's more personal inclinations, as she writes Dulcie, for it is possible that her historical understanding of gendered oppression is prompting her to expect that David's contradictions will be inscribed on the body of his betrayed comrade. The text makes several references to particular historical women — Krotoa and Saartje Baartman for example (Driver 2001 230) — who were the occasion of vigorous debates on the politics of identity in the 1990s (Coetzee 1998); and within the fictional account of David's research, Andrew le Fleur's wife Rachael, or Dorie (little thorn) as he calls her, provides similar material. For example, Andrew will not tell Rachael about his political dealings, his alliance with the Bhaca and the Hlangweni people in order to regain the land that the colonial powers are denying them, and he justifies his refusal on the grounds that '[t]hese things are too complicated for women' (53) whom he dismisses as extravagant and frivolous, but when he has to hide crucial documents from the men who have betrayed him to the colonial authorities, he has no

hesitation in asking his wife to help. He no doubt knows where she will hide them — on her body, in the hollow at the small of her back (55). The narrator knows that the word 'steatopygia', used for the congenitally large buttocks of Griqua women, fascinates David (17) and that he is angered by the associations in the colonial mind between bodily shape and concupiscence; but what he does not ask himself, and what she does not prompt him to ask, is whether echoes of the colonial and patriarchal impositions of meaning on bodies are still operative in his present.

The expectations which arise from the narrator's knowledge of the past and her unwilling location in a power struggle in the present combine to force her into complicity with David over Dulcie's representation, and this may be why she cannot cope when he is finally brought to speak of the single gesture of placing his hands on Dulcie's shoulders (116) which had been such a powerful revelation of his feelings. As he reaches the moment of confession, the narrator is suddenly terrified:

Once, thank God, once only — he looks up at me, into me, with irises a ghostly green line of light around pupils black and dilated, like those of a trapped animal, mute, distorted, and it is I who must look away and pray that he will say nothing.

This is an intrusion, a weight that I cannot carry. That no amanuensis should have to carry, I later decide as I ponder the boundaries of my task. (151)

When the narrator, hoping to prevent the silence that she too has come to desire from obliterating Dulcie, tries to imagine how Dulcie herself sees the connection with David, she dwells, perhaps guiltily, on this silence and has Dulcie think: 'She understands the question of honour, but what she cannot endure is his silence, the primitive fear that to speak of something will bring it into being, let loose the tokolos' (183). When she finally allows herself to represent David's brief embrace from Dulcie's point of view, she writes:

His fingertips pressed precisely into the wounds under her shirt, plunged intimately into her flesh, caressed every cavity, every organ, her lungs, liver, kidneys, her broken heart, with a lick of fire. She would not have been surprised to see those hands withdraw dripping with blood. (199)

The lover's caress is no different from the torturer's intimacy; and writing itself participates in this terrible bond, for what the narrator may have imagined in order to bring Dulcie into being, into a body of writing, is at the same time what ensures that she cannot be written except as a 'recurring imprint' (150). She cannot be 'translated into words, into [the] language we use for everyday matters' (151).

Yet — and this is the novel's own enactment of a 'fracture between discourse and the speaking subject' (Donnell 113) — not everything about Dulcie slides into the gap between David's need to grasp the world through language and the narrator's discursive doubts (Driver 2001 217). The narrator's shock tactics do work on David; firstly he acknowledges verbally that Dulcie probably was in Camp Quatro in 1984 and might have been tortured there on suspicion of ill-

discipline. Then he accuses the narrator's imaginings of causing him actually to see Dulcie's mutilated body 'full bleed' (201) on the computer screen before him and he admits that he may be responsible for what might be happening to her. Finally he says that a special connection between them has always been suspected and that she is now under attack not only because '[s]he must give up her power, hand over her uniform, make way for the big men' but because '[s]he knows too much' (204). Despite the inadequacies of language and the bodily dangers of writing, the reader has been made to imagine Dulcie — and David — as historical subjects.

The desire associated with writing and the limits of writing are most fully established in the narrative through Dulcie, but, in another example of the novel's delight in paradox, the experience of writing as an absolute is also explored through her. This happens when David finds a longish hit list that contains his name with Dulcie's below it; it has been placed under a chair in his hotel room in Kokstad where he has gone to research Adam Kok and his nineteenth-century Griqua followers, including Andrew le Fleur. In a hitlist, signifier and signified no longer connect through received cultural agreement; instead the name coalesces into meaning with mysterious, magical, terrifying import. The narrator imagines this moment as one when, '[w]ritten down, intended to be read, your name becomes the bearer of menace' (112). One unexpected recognition to which the horror of such a reversal can bring us is that the fact of cultural agreement enabling the uncertain and arbitrary connections between language and the world is a reassuring, if not vital, one for us. Once again, the poststructuralist questions about language have been taken into a local socio-political purpose; they are not an aspect of what has been stigmatised as art's self-regarding withdrawal from social responsibility, but a representational and philosophical entry into the very real issues of acting and surviving in a particular time and place.

If gender was a factor in the impossibility of writing Dulcie, it is also crucial to the shock that David gets from this instance of finality in writing's power to name, for the list is 'in a girlish hand' (113). Cultural difference too is used to open up the nature of the shock that the list gives David when the narrator suggests that its power to name is 'a cultural variation on sticking pins into a doll or sending a tokolos' (112). As has already been mentioned, the narrator will give David's silence about Dulcie a similar slant when she has Dulcie reflect that his silence enacts 'the primitive fear that to speak of something will bring it into being, let loose the tokolos' (183).

Because writing is presented as a much more complex issue in *David's Story*, discussion of it has moved a long way from the less provisional approach of *Bloodlines*, but, perhaps not surprisingly, the hitlist and its associations with the tokolos provides a way of reinstating the similarities between these two novels, and of underlining the central focus of my discussion — the phenomenon of two novelists simultaneously reading the demands of a particular, local conjuncture

in such comparable ways. In *Bloodlines*, Dora is helped to imagine the missing years in Dollie's story (from her first meeting with Joseph Macken during the war to her death in 1913), when she conceives of the charmed coat of animal skins that Dollie makes for her lover in order to keep him 'faithful and safe' (214) in battle. The coat does protect him but it cannot bring him back to her, as she knows as soon as she hears his account of having kissed the flag of 'crisp ... green Irish poplin sewn for us by women of Dublin' (215). When she is certain that she has been abandoned, Dollie sends him the piece of the charmed coat that she had kept for herself. Two years later, she is reminded of the power of her charm by the final letter that Dora, in the novel's closing pages, imagines her receiving. It comes from Kathleen Gort and tells Dollie that her lost lover now lives in physical and mental torment and that his Irish wife fears that their unborn child may be harmed by 'some force, some African spectre' (277). Then, although Kathleen Gort tries to distance herself from such a one-sided attribution of magic by acknowledging that '[d]ifferent beliefs are as we know but lenses through which to look at Truth' (278), the letter concludes by asking Dollie to show mercy to Joseph Macken. The charmed coat has brought its mysterious powers into the narrative from Dollie's culture and beliefs, but whatever the contradictions in Kathleen Gort's appeal, Boehmer has been careful to support an even-handed view of cultural difference by pointing up many examples of 'charms' in Western culture too. The flag that Maud Gonne sends the Irish Brigade in South Africa (McCracken 58) is, as Dollie knows immediately, as much a charm, a symbol with mysterious powers, as her coat. So are the songs that Joseph Macken sings to her, causing her to murmur 'you too know the heaviness of a charm' (211), and so too is the red t-shirt that belongs to Joe Makken and which Anthea, on impulse, asks to wear. This even-handedness has obvious connections with what Wicomb is doing with the tokolos-hitlist in *David's Story*. Each novelist is, by incorporating a belief in magical symbols into her representation of both of the cultures in conflict at two particular moments in South African history, challenging the easy and persistent division in colonial discourse between what has been claimed as civilised and Western and what has been dismissed as primitive and African. It is, however, in linking this challenge to writing — to the novel's own medium — and to the representation of a woman's body, that Wicomb is able to compel us to question the extent of the power that we are prepared to grant to 'writing' as both a document and an action.

What this still quite selective discussion of the bodies of writing in *David's Story* and *Bloodlines* has tried to suggest is that they 'offer their own analytic guidelines' (Boehmer 249) by exposing to readers the specific ways in which the meanings of writing, and of bodies, are shaped by a particular conjuncture in South African history. I now wish to suggest that the extensive intertextuality of each novel also serves the historicity of the local, and that each one does so as it situates its major intertextual encounters *in the past*. One set of intertexts in

Bloodlines is the collection of songs and poems which Dollie Makken learned from her Irish lover during the Anglo-Boer War and passed on to her descendants.¹⁰ By the time we hear them they have, like Dollie's kist [chest] which contains some of Kathleen Gort's letters and which has remained on Dora's verandah unattended for years, become household clutter; they have been translated to form part of Joe Makken's collection of freedom songs, family songs, South African songs. In *David's Story* there is a comparable example of the abrogation of a text leading to its naturalisation and absorption into local culture. It comes through a passage from Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* that was brought to South Africa by Eduard la Fleur. Some generations later Andrew hears a daily recitation of lines which contain the phrase 'the due contention for mastery betwixt the radical heat and the radical moisture' (88) and we are told that since childhood he too has waited impatiently to 'get to the root of what he believed to be a sacred text' (89). Wicomb is asking us to relish a misunderstanding which has persisted in the le Fleur family since the eighteenth century of Sterne's playful quotation of the ancient theory of bodily humours, but she is also pointing out that despite this misreading, or perhaps because of it, the lines have over time been localised to serve a very real 'struggle for justice' as le Fleur searches for a way to 'fan the dying embers of self-respect of a people driven and crushed and robbed of the land, which is to say of their selves' (89). With the passage of time, the meanings which arise from these intertexts are not so much actively palimpsestic, 'in between' the metropolis and the margin, as local and naturalised.

Another of Wicomb's intertexts that enables her to take up the history in South African writing of race and its base in biological determinism and, indirectly, to connect with the theory of the bodily humours, is *God's Stepchildren* (1924) by Sarah Gertrude Millin.¹¹ In his essay on Millin, J.M. Coetzee argues that, taking her views from the European ideas that had been 'viable intellectual currency' (1988 137) since the mid-nineteenth century, she thought that it was in the blood that 'the most fundamental distinction [that is, racial] between peoples is marked' (138) and, literally, passed on. To account for racial diversity and the need for racial purity, the idea was used that blood could vary, it 'can be thick or thin, hot or cold, healthy or diseased' (138). This variety could then be 'metaphorically correlated to a psycho-physical state' (146) and it is here that connections are made with the humours and their necessary balance in each personality — sanguine (airy), phlegmatic (watery), choleric (fiery) and melancholy (earthy). A lingering of biological determinism in contemporary South Africa is clearly also one of the presences in Boehmer's title, *Bloodlines*. Its linguistic continuity is made evident, although not actively questioned, when the 'doctor from England' tells Dora that her child Joe, the bomber, is a 'sanguinary' child, '[f]ull of blood and good humour' (83).

As the example of Wicomb's use of Millin indicates, intracultural processes within South Africa mean that when *David's Story* was published in 2000, these

intertexts no longer, as they once might have done, signal a concern with continuing metropolitan hegemony: because the exchange between texts is now a South African dialogue between past and present, their citation is not primarily a resistant act of writing back to the centre. Rather, texts from a South African past are under examination in the present; they have long been culturally translated and relocated, and their dialogue with the present is a localised one. At this point, and because these issues are nonetheless postcolonial, it may be helpful to remember what cultural translatability looks like to the European critic, Wolfgang Iser, precisely because he omits recognition of the forcible hegemony of colonial culture, a hegemony which I am suggesting that *David's Story* and *Bloodlines* are now moving beyond. He points to three aspects of exchange: 'Receiving a tradition entails recasting the inheritance; charting the open-endedness of a cultural present makes the tradition peripheral to the now important core; translating different cultures into each other results in a recursive looping between them' (296). Iser sees the intra and inter cultural exchanges as free and open, he gives them none of the coercion which has so occupied analysts of colonial discourse, but his selective focus may be unintentionally helpful to South Africans for, despite the workings of neo-imperialism in our cultural life, it may provide a reminder of what texts such as *David's Story* and *Bloodlines* are pointing towards — that the reciprocity, the exchange between cultures which Iser presents as unproblematic in Europe, is what we can now begin to consider in South Africa.

Certainly the idea of interaction and reciprocity is one which beckons to the South African critic, Michael Chapman, when he asks for a new critical practice based in a self-confidently located comparative study. He turns away from comparisons produced in anxiety, which is how he characterises much postcolonial work and its concern with the dichotomies of 'the centre and the edge, or the metropole and the periphery, or the rich North and the poor South' (47), and seeks instead 'open conversation between different understandings, different vocabularies, and different cultural paradigms' (48). An important step towards this open conversation is, I think, what Boehmer, as critic, has pointed to in her suggestion that postcolonial criticism will increasingly find that it must 'address itself to the particularity of different textual situations, to the history of a neighbourhood, or the struggles of a compound ... [in order] to locate texts in their own specific worlds of meaning' (1995 248). It is in this spirit that I think it important to read *Bloodlines* and *David's Story* primarily for the ways in which their authors represent the specific history of particular South Africans at the beginning of the decade in which their society moved, at last, towards democracy.

NOTES

- ¹ 'Autobiographical' takes up Lionnet's suggestion that such rewriting is not so much a 'retrieval of a repressed dimension of the *private* self but the rewriting of ... ethnic history, the recreation of a *collective* identity' (Lionnet 39) [emphasis in original].

- ² Zoë Wicomb has discussed the links between colonially imposed 'shame' and coloured identity in an article (1988) which takes as its point of departure the 1994 election in the Western Cape in which the coloured vote went, largely, against the ANC.
- ³ As I give such importance to the specificities of issues and meanings in these two novels, I would like to acknowledge my particular indebtedness to the historical and critical account of Wicomb's novel in Dorothy Driver's 'Afterword' (2001) to *David's Story*.
- ⁴ The details of Joseph Macken's movements match those given for the First Irish Transvaal Brigade by McCracken (1989 141–49). It was under the command of JYF Blake and John MacBride was second-in-command. In her introduction to the issue of Kunapipi titled 'South African War?: 1899–1902', which she edited, Boehmer writes of people such as the Irish soldiers: 'It would be worth revisiting the South African War from our centennial, and millennial, perspective, if only to reread and re-evaluate the participation of this vast mass of (alleged) bit-part actors, both assistant and victims, consorts and collaborators; to see how and to what extent their involvement and legacy changes the accepted picture of the war' (x).
- ⁵ David understands that Eduard la Fleur and his mother were Huguenot refugees, arriving in South Africa in the seventeenth century from France, but the narrator points out that David is no historian and in imagining that Madam la Fleur might have been housekeeper to the anatomist Goerge Cuvier (1769–1832), David has 'grafted ... [his forebears] onto the wrong century' (35). Sometime between their arrival and the nineteenth century, the family name changes to le Fleur.
- ⁶ The suspicions with which his comrades view David's independent actions might have applied equally to Joe Makken in *Bloodlines*, but this issue is not pursued. In fact it is suggested that he receives approval from his superiors.
- ⁷ Boehmer writes that the 'hands' that wrote these letters are 'imagined but nonetheless keenly felt' (2000 np).
- ⁸ This aspect of Wicomb's novel makes it a rejoinder to Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*.
- ⁹ Driver suggests that we are invited to contemplate the possibility that David himself has been one of Dulcie's torturers (2001 240).
- ¹⁰ Boehmer chooses two songs to quote at length for the Makken family, though there are references to others. One is a 'somber anathema' (van Wyk Smith 1978 84) which had been translated from the Gaelic. Lady Gregory calls it 'The Curse of the Boers on England' (1903 95); in the novel it begins 'England was a Queen/A Queen without sorrow/But we will take from her/Fiercely her crown' (167). The other song begins 'When the Lion shall loose its strength', and is said by Lady Gregory to be 'an old Irish vers' (89) prophesying the defeat of Ireland's enemies. The 'Song of the Transvaal Irish brigade', which van Wyk Smith says is 'more concerned with Ireland than the Transvaal' (84) is not quoted in the novel.
- ¹¹ See Driver (1999) on Wicomb's responses to Millin's novel in 'Another Story'.

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JILLIAN EDELSTEIN



Jillian Edelstein has been actively working in editorial and advertising portraiture for more than a decade. In the foreword to her recent publication, *Truth & Lies*, she writes:

I became a press photographer in the Johannesburg area at the beginning of the 1980s. Growing up white in apartheid South Africa entitled one to massive and instant privilege. It led to complicated emotions — among them anger and guilt. Photography was a way, for me, of channelling those emotions. At the time I believed that by pointing a camera at security police, or at Casspirs (armoured personnel carriers) cruising the townships, or by documenting clashes between protestors and riot police I might help to change the situation in our country. (*Truth & Lies*, Granta, 2001, 12)

Having established her roots in photojournalism, Jillian left her native South Africa in 1985 to enter the more competitive European editorial field, initially working for the *Sunday Times* in 1986 as a freelancer. She has since established herself as one of Britain's foremost portrait photographers for which work she has received a number of prestigious awards including the Photographers' Gallery Portrait Photographer of the Year Award, The Kodak U.K. Young Photographer of the Year Award, and a Portrait Award at the Association of Photographers Annual Awards (all received within a six month period between 1989 and 1990). 1989 also saw the creation of a project titled 'Affinities' — a photographic series representing working partnerships in London and New York. This appeared as a regular photo slot in *The Saturday Telegraph Magazine* for eighteen months in 1993 and 1994 under the title 'Soul Mates' which culminated in her first solo exhibition in 1994 at The Special Photographers Gallery in the UK and at The Bensusan Museum in South Africa. In 1999 Jillian was overall runner up in the Polaroid European Final Art Awards. She has exhibited at The National Portrait Gallery since 1989: her work has been included in 'Women by Women' 1989, the show on 'Comedians' 1994, 'Faces of the Eighties' 1995, the Kobal Awards exhibition 1996, 'Women by Women' 2001, 'Business Partnerships' sponsored by NPG/British Telecom & Management Today, 2001, and is featured in the

permanent collection. Jillian is a member of NETWORK Photographers and continues to work internationally for many publications including *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Red Magazine*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *Marie Claire*, *VOGUE* and *Harpers & Queen*.

In 1997 she won the VISA D'Or in Perpignan for her work on The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Jillian spent four years covering the hearings in large cities and small towns throughout the country. Of this experience she observes:

I knew the contradictions and the controversies that raged around the Truth Commission right from the start. But nothing prepared me for the emotional world within the community halls and courtrooms in which we observers witnessed the testimonies and confessions of the victims and perpetrators where truth gave way to lies and lies gave way to truth.

I often pondered over why people agreed to be photographed. For the victims, I guessed it might have been because they wanted to reclaim their dignity, their past, or to feel acknowledged for the part they had played. Largely it seemed to me they were grateful to have had the opportunity to share their experiences and to make public their painful stories. Perhaps this process of being in front of the camera was part of that ritual. It was harder to comprehend why the perpetrators offered themselves up so willingly for a portrait, often proudly, as if they had played some heroic part in South Africa's history. (*Truth & Lies*, 12–13)

Her work on the TRC culminated in the book *Truth & Lies* published by Granta in October 2001, and was exhibited in that year at The Association of Photographers Gallery. It is Granta's first photographic publication, edited by Liz Jobey and designed by Peter Dyer, with co-editions being published in France, USA and South Africa. The photographs and text that follow have been reproduced from this book.

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

‘Outsiders have been sentimental about the South African process, as they have been about Nelson Mandela, the rainbow nation and so on. Everyone likes to watch catharsis, especially if it is someone else’s. For insiders, citizens of South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation was not a spectacle; it wasn’t entertainment. ... No one who was there was entirely sure that such a bitter catharsis was always a good thing for the country or the individuals to go through. There is an African proverb: Truth is good, but not all truth is good to say.

‘As Alex Boraine, deputy Chairperson of the TRC, makes clear in his recent memoir, the impetus for the creation of the Commission in 1993 was not just the desire by the majority to unmask apartheid, but also to deal with the legacy of violence in the African National Congress liberation struggle itself. ...

‘There were three phases of the process: first, victims testified in vast public hearings carried on South African television and radio; then there were amnesty hearings in which perpetrators testified and were cross-examined in order to receive amnesty; finally there were specific sectoral hearings, on the judiciary, business, the media. The process began in 1995, and the amnesty portion of the process was concluded in June 2001.

...

‘Nothing proved more controversial, inside or outside, than the amnesty provisions of the South African model. For outsiders, the victims’ claims to justice were being sacrificed for the sake of conciliating the white power structure. For many insiders, especially victims, the amnesty provisions were asking a society of victims to display a scarcely human forbearance. What outsiders often failed to understand, and insiders knew in their bones, was that the basic reasons for amnesty were political. Amnesty was the precondition for a peaceful transition of power.

...

‘[because] there has been a Truth Commission ... an essential taboo has been broken: the moral legitimacy of the liberation struggle has been subjected to scrutiny, and if the justice of the struggle has been reaffirmed, the crimes committed in the name of the struggle have been identified. It would be an impermissible lie to believe that all is permitted a people who have suffered ultimate injustice. The TRC may have made it impossible to give voice to this lie. As Jillian Edelstein’s memorable photographs show, the truth is imperishably lodged in the hearts and minds of those who were there’ (Michael Ignatieff, ‘Introduction’, *Truth & Lies*, 15–21).

Mrs Mzimela

JE diary entry, 7 June 1998:

Bheki Ntuli, a local trade union official from the Empangeni area in Natal, took me to meet three families who had testified before the Truth Commission. One of them was the Mzimela family. Mrs Mzimela told me that in October 1994 her relatives had gathered at her house for a big party. It had been raining. In the distance she had heard the sound of people singing. Suddenly a group of Inkatha 'impris' — warriors — burst in. They opened fire. Her husband and three other men, including a local cattle herder, her cousin, Lucky, and her nephew, Sipho, were shot dead. Mrs Mzimela went into her house and emerged with an old Lion matchbox. It contained the bullets she had picked up after the shooting. (158)



Mrs Mzimela, with the bullets that killed her husband and two of her relatives, near Esikhaweni, KwaZulu/Natal, 7 June 1998

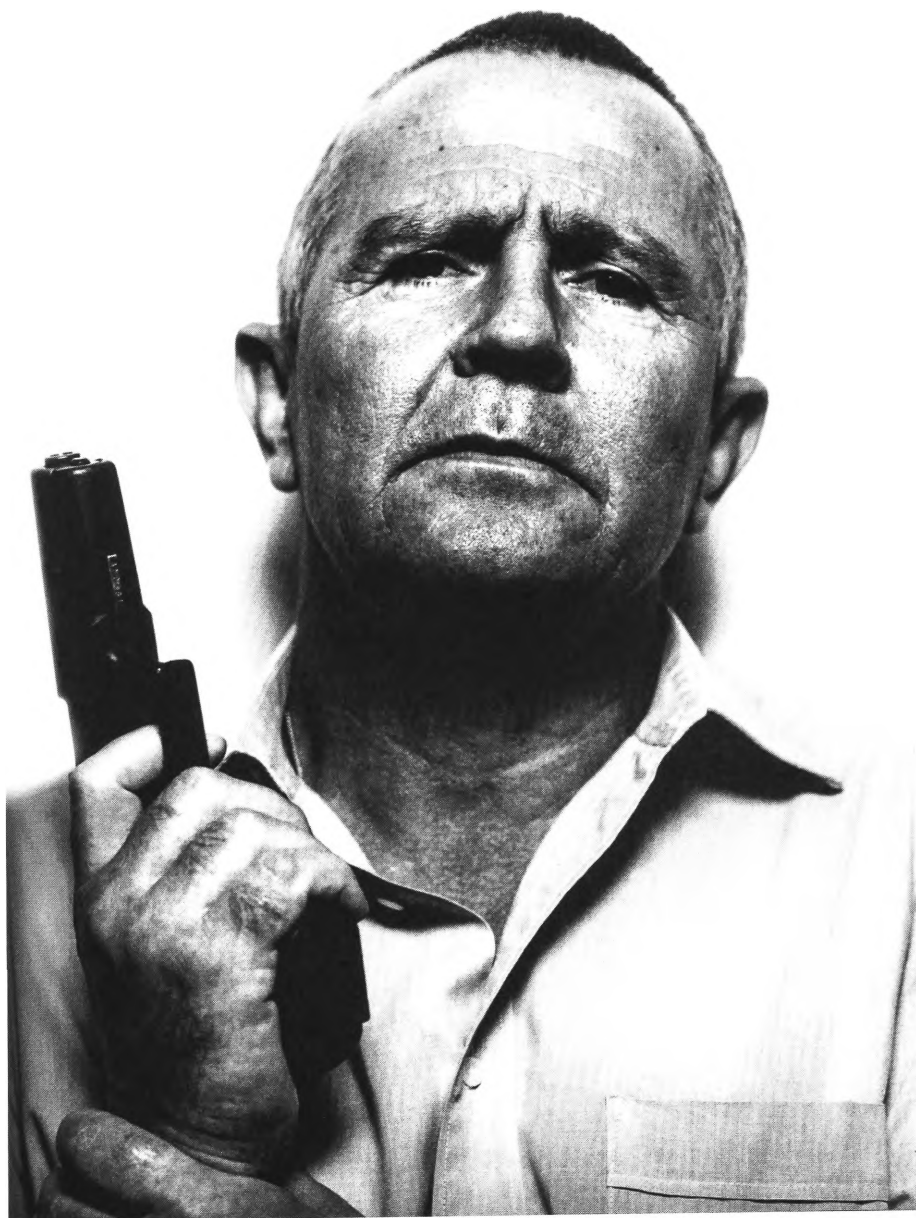
Dirk Coetzee

Dirk Coetzee was the first commander of the special 'counter-insurgency' unit at Vlakplaas. He has ordered the deaths of many ANC activists, including Griffiths Mxenge, a human rights lawyer, who was stabbed forty times at Umlazi Stadium in Durban, and Sizwe Kondile, a young law graduate from the Eastern Cape, who was interrogated and beaten then handed over to Coetzee who had him shot and his body burned. ... In August 1997 he was granted amnesty for Mxenge's murder. At the TRC hearing in Durban, Coetzee was asked what he felt about what he had done to the Mxenge family. He said he felt:

.... humiliation, embarrassment and the hopelessness of a pathetic, 'I am sorry for what I have done' What else can I offer them? A pathetic nothing, so in all honesty I don't expect the Mxenge family to forgive me, because I don't know how I ever in my life would be able to forgive a man like Dirk Coetzee if he'd done to me what I've done to them. (110)

JE diary entry, 26 February 1997:

I follow Dirk Coetzee's detailed instructions down jacaranda-lined Isipingo Street. For a few short weeks every year, this dull brown town is turned purple by a mass of exquisite blossom. My first impression is of how heavily Coetzee has incarcerated himself. His Rottweilers are snarling, and the barbed wire around the metal gates glistens in the sunshine. Tea is served in china cups on a floral tray. So civilised, I think, holding my cup and saucer. I notice that wherever Coetzee goes, the leather purse which hangs off his wrist like a little handbag goes with him. 'It contains a gun,' he informs me. 'I take it everywhere, even when I go to the toilet.' (110)



Dirk Coetzee, Pretoria, 26 February 1997

3. Singqukwana Malgas

Singqukwana Malgas was an ANC veteran who had been imprisoned on Robben Island for fourteen years for his anti-apartheid activities. He had originally been sentenced to twenty-two years but, represented by Nelson Mandela, his sentence was reduced on appeal. While he was in prison, Malgas's house had been repeatedly firebombed and one of his sons had been killed. He suffered a stroke, partly as a result of his injuries from torture, which left him confined to a wheelchair.

When he first appeared at the Truth Commission hearings in April 1996, Malgas avoided describing his ordeal at the hands of the security police. But under questioning by Alex Boraine, the deputy head of the Commission, he finally gave details of his torture. He described the 'helicopter method' in which a mask was put over his face to suffocate him, and then a stick was inserted behind his knees from which he was hung upside down. He broke down during this testimony and tried to cover the 'shame' of tears with his hands. Archbishop Tutu, who was presiding over the hearings, was so moved that he, too, began to weep. Malgas told the Commission that he would like to tell his torturers, 'If we were only going to get freedom over our dead bodies, I'd like to make them aware we've got freedom'. He died in 1999. (130)



Singqokwana Malgas, New Brighton township, Port Elizabeth, 13 February 1997

Hennie Smit

Hennie Smitt's eight-year-old son, Cornio, was killed in 1985 by a bomb blast in the Sanlam Shopping Centre in Amanzimtoti, Natal, just before Christmas. Four other people were killed and over sixty injured. Three MK members were arrested and sentenced to death. It was claimed that the bomb had been planted in retaliation for a raid by the security forces on an ANC base in Maseru, Lesotho, which had killed nine people. The three MK members were executed.

Hennie Smit spoke very movingly about how, after one of the bombers, Andrew Zondo, had been hanged, he had gone to visit Zondo's parents to console them. He told the Truth Commission that at first he hated all blacks for killing his son, but now he had come to realise that his son was a hero of the struggle who died so all South Africans could be free. Mr Smit became an outcast in his own white community of Pretoria:

I told newspapers that I thought my son was a hero, because he died for freedom ... he died in the cause of the oppressed people. A lot of people criticised me for this. They thought I was a traitor and they condemned me. But I still feel that way today.

Mr Smit lives in Pretoria where he buried his son. He breeds doves and repairs broken television sets. (204)



Henni Smit with his dove, Snow White, Pretoria, May 1997

Exhumation at Boshoeck

JE diary entry, 17 March 1998:

In November 1985 three young ANC guerrillas were killed by security police and taken to Abraham Grobbelaar's farm at Boshoeck to be buried. Thirteen years later the crowd wait patiently in the hot sun amid the stench of death and the uncertainty. Instead of three corpses, the grave yields up twelve, sealed inside black plastic bags. The unidentified bodies are numbered A1, A2, A3 and so on. The digging stops when the sun begins to set. The gruesome task would be resumed the following day. (212)

Joyce Mtimkulu, who discovered that her son, Siphiwo, had been shot and detained, poisoned by the security police, released, kidnapped again and finally killed, seemed to speak for many when she told me, after listening to the testimonies of those responsible,

'at least now we know what happened'. (Edelstein, 'Foreword', 13)



Exhumation at Boshhoek, near Rustenburg, Northern Province, March 1998

ELAINE YOUNG

Interview with Achmat Dangor

South African writer Achmat Dangor was born in 1948, as the Nationalist government — the architects of Apartheid — came to power. In 1973 he was banned for five years for his involvement in the radical black cultural group Black Thoughts, which he had helped to establish. Although forbidden to attend public gatherings and publish any of his writing during that time, Dangor wrote in secret and, in the 1980s, helped found the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), a group of mainly black writers dedicated to the freedom struggle. From 1986 to 1991 he was executive director of the rural development agency Kagiso Trust, and in 1992 taught South African literature



and creative writing at the City University of New York. He was subsequently appointed Director of the Independent Development Trust and, in 1999, was made Chief Executive Officer of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. Alongside his work in the development field he continued to write, and has published seven works of fiction and poetry to date. These include two collections of poetry, *Bulldozer* (1989) and *Private Voices* (1993), a short story collection (*Waiting for Leila*, 1982), a play (*Majiet*, 1986), and three novels, *The Z Town Trilogy* (1990), *Kafka's Curse* (1997) and *Bitter Fruit* (2001). He has won many literary prizes, including the 1998 Herman Charles Bosman Prize for *Kafka's Curse*, a novel which is in its second edition and has been translated into seven languages. In July 2001 he relocated to New York where he is currently working on his next novel. In March this year he returned to South Africa to participate in the Time of the Writer Festival in Durban.

EY *How has living in New York affected your writing about South Africa so far? And how do you think it might influence the way you write about South Africa in future?*

AD The most immediate influence is physical. New York is an immense, noisy, rowdy but wonderful place and I am so distracted by the novelty. I do

consultancy work with HIV/AIDS two days a week and I am able to write three days a week. But there are many distractions, so many cultural distractions — things that I never had time to do, like going to museums and art exhibitions, and going to listen to people read poetry. The other distraction is that New York is such an enormously noisy place. We live in an apartment just off Park Avenue and 34th which is like a major crossroad across Manhattan. You hear cars and noise all the time.

So I've decided not to pursue the sequel to *Bitter Fruit* for the moment. Instead I am writing a novel about a South African in New York. It's based on an idea that I've had for a long time — almost like something from *Death in Venice*, coupled with Garcia Marquez's *Death in the Time of Cholera*, about a character living in South Africa who was once in the Underground. During that time he had a relationship with his MK¹ commander, who warned him ahead of time to get out of the country when they planted the bomb at Magoo's Bar in Durban. He loses touch with her and she disappears into the system. Years later he gets an obsession to find her when he sees a picture of a woman who turns out to be the South African Consul-General's wife and he recognises her. So he moves to New York to find her, which he does, but the consequences are tragic. It's loosely based on Robert McBride's² story but it's essentially a story of a man with an obsession. Men are like that: they have obsessions which they don't want to let go of. In a way he is forced to come to terms with what he is and the things that he did, the things that he evaded and the things that he didn't do. Instead of setting the story in Cape Town as I had wanted to originally, with a different context and a different occupation for the woman that he is obsessed with, I set it in New York. It gave me the opportunity to get out of my system some of the stories that have been there for a long time: the untold stories of people who have been in exile, in the Underground. All you tend to hear are the black and white stories of the good guys and their enemies, and the ambiguities in between are never explored. So that's how I decided to deal with noisy and overwhelming New York.

EY *Reading your last novel Bitter Fruit, which was published just before September 11, was quite an uncanny experience in terms of the way it deals with issues of Muslim identity and fundamentalist groups within Islam. What were the implications of the coincidence of the release of your book and the events of September 11?*

AD It makes my sequel to the book very difficult because in it Michael, who now becomes Noor, goes to India to find his mythical grandfather's roots and ends up in Afghanistan in a school — not the Al-Qaeda, but an Islamic

school — where the disenchantment within him grows. But this disenchantment has nothing to do with ideology — this disenchantment is with himself. In a sense it is difficult to write this book because everybody is going to measure it against September 11. I'm sitting in New York, writing in an atmosphere of superpatriotism, xenophobia and a renewed interest in Islam — but from a very perverse point of view.

EY *Your penultimate novel has a strong storytelling voice. Do you write with a sense of yourself as a storyteller? And what sense of readership, or audience, do you have?*

AD I do see myself as a storyteller and one of my problems is that I see myself more as a storyteller than as a structured novelist. For example, I know that *Kafka's Curse* is a very confusing structure for many people, but I'm primarily a storyteller and I rely on the strength of the story to carry my novel. As for my sense of an audience, I have none. I try not to think of an audience because that would undoubtedly colour things and introduce all kinds of other elements. I do try to think of readers and whether I am being fair to them and explaining myself clearly to them. I don't think of a specific reader, though — and if I do, it must be deeply subconscious.

EY *As a former anti-apartheid activist and, more recently, Director of the Independent Development Trust and CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, you have been heavily involved in bringing about social change in South Africa in various ways. How would you characterise fiction that is, to use the old catch-phrase, 'socially relevant' in contemporary South Africa? Do you think of yourself as having a kind of conscious role to play as a writer?*

AD I don't think any writer should have a conscious role to play, trying to define society for better or for worse. We function better when our dark creative side dominates and we look at socio-economic conditions from our own point of view. I am very disturbed emotionally and artistically by the kind of things I see, for example people dying from HIV/AIDS. My work in that area has exposed me to a side of South African society that I never thought I would see. Here is a literal plague that's killing people. Yet right from our own president down to traditional leaders are people who deny that this plague exists. It's like a writer living in the Middle Ages denying that there were rats. So in this sense I feel compelled artistically to write something about human beings who are living under these conditions. I am not going to consciously proselytise that there is a link between HIV and AIDS — those are things that I think people better qualified than me can argue about. But the sheer human dimension of this tragedy, the way it is not being dealt with, and its consequences, are something that I can't ignore as a writer. So I will explore these kinds of

things in my writing, but I don't think I can consciously write as a literary propagandist.

EY *Could you say that there are any particular challenges that you face as a South African writer now, other than what you've already mentioned?*

AD Yes. The biggest challenge I think is psychological, not just for me but for many other writers. Mercifully many of us have been able to make the crossing, as it were, from one side to the other. Let me put it this way: I can't see how history can be compartmentalised — as if there were something called pre-apartheid South Africa and then a wall came down and wiped the past out and now we suddenly have a post-apartheid or 'new' South Africa. There is a greater continuity in our history than we want to recognise and the challenge is to find the continuity and not to get hung up or stuck on genres that are so overused. Nadine Gordimer and I attended a writers' seminar at the University of Natal today and she made a comment about the number of people who are writing about their childhoods under apartheid — black, white or Indian — as if that's the only experience we've had. People shy away from contemporary issues because they are difficult to deal with: they are complex and they test your loyalties — or your prejudices. As a writer, if you can't overcome those things, you've really got a problem. What I find quite disturbing is the contest between relevancy and irrelevancy. Quite frankly, badly written relevant literature is as unentertaining as badly written irrelevant literature.

EY *Do you feel that it is possible — or desirable — to speak about the emergence of a 'common South African story' in recent years?*

AD I don't think that there need necessarily be what we call a 'South African Literature' almost as if it's an ideology. Writing is not like tourism that you can package and put a label on, or a flag that you can use as a gimmick to sell things and to bring tourists here. Writing is far more dynamic and sensitive and it engages human beings in different responses; the reader and the writer relate to each other in different ways. So we can't package our literature and that's why I am really hesitant to talk about a sudden 'South African literature'. There will obviously be some commonality in what people write because we live in the same country and we have similar experiences, although we see them from different perspectives. I would hate to see the day when what we call South African literature is nothing but a kind of national stricture or framework — a straight jacket, as it were, within which you have to operate. Why don't they ask writers like Salman Rushdie who an English writer is? Rushdie is English — he lives there. But ask him if he is an English writer and he will laugh at you. So there is a distinction between South African writers and their writing and

South African writing. South Africans have a terrible habit: when we don't know how to deal with complexity, we want to reduce it to the simple and lowest common denominator. So let's all have one national literature — that way we accommodate everybody. There is an old cliché — 'Some writers are more equal than others'. So to expect Nadine Gordimer or Zakes Mda or anybody else to conform to some mythical, difficult-to-define South African literature is for me completely unnecessary and quite frankly I ignore it.

EY *At the opening of the Time of the Writer Festival, you said that you had no intention of depicting South Africa as if it has no flaws. To what extent do you intend your writing to depict a sort of 'truth' about South Africa at present — and how (if at all) can this be used in a positive way?*

AD I am not sure whether it should be used in a positive or negative way. Again, I've learned a lesson from the anti-apartheid struggle when writing was seen as an instrument of freedom: writing cannot be a tool or instrument for anything. When it is, it begins to lose its independence and imagination and becomes diminished and shackled to something else. I think the phrase I used at the opening of the Writers' Festival was that my imagination no longer wants to climb up flagpoles — in fact my imagination is forcing me to climb down flagpoles. I'm not in search of different flagpoles, either — I just ignore them. Writing about South Africa's flaws is not going to be something deliberate — I am not going to look for a sore and scratch it. I see the country as a very complex totality and I see many different kinds of people in it. I see individuals, primarily, and I respond to individuals — not to groups and not to representations. The notion that writers can change the world is a bit arrogant and vain anyway. What we can do is record it in a way that is imaginative and different. I am going to write South Africa as I see it. Undoubtedly flaws will emerge — both in my writing, I guess, and in South Africa. We all have flaws that we need to address. Some of them are inherited, some of them are of our own making, some are unavoidable and others can be avoided.

Living in the U.S. I am constantly asked questions about South Africa: about our President's view on HIV/AIDS, about why things haven't changed for the majority of black people, and so on; and the questions come from different angles. African-Americans want to know why black people are still poor, while white Americans and some exiled South Africans lament the fact that white people have been marginalised — or so they believe. I keep telling them that in between these stark views of theirs is a different reality and greater ambiguity than they want to see. There is a bigger black middle class than there ever was before in South Africa, and that is a major change. And yes, there is poverty and the poverty is going to take a long time to eradicate, and yes there are many white people leaving,

just as there are African people leaving, and Coloureds and Indians — everybody is leaving. So the migration of exiled people from South Africa shouldn't be seen simply as what they call a 'chicken run'. This is such a global world: if I can live in New York and be a South African, what's wrong with that? It doesn't mean that because I live in New York I am not South African or I am anti-South African.

Where we go from here, and where our government goes to from here, depends on how vigilant the citizens are, whether they make their vote count and whether or not people speak their mind, and I fully intend to speak my mind. Within that, in literary terms, I may upset people, though I don't consciously set out to do that. I am not writing for the sake of creating controversy — by the way, controversy doesn't necessarily sell books, it generates publicity, but it doesn't sell books.

EY *The central drama of Bitter Fruit is the re-emergence of a ghost from the apartheid past who brings about the dissolution of a family and the shell of normality it has erected around itself. Is this a metaphor for the impossibility of burying the past and hence the real nature of the 'truth and reconciliation' process?*

AD If there was any ideological starting point at all, it is probably my feeling that in wanting to forgive and forget so quickly, we swept a lot of things under the carpet — we didn't deal with a lot of issues and they've festered there. One of them is the long history of the abuse of women. The activists — the ANC, the UDF³ and other people — talk about torture and abuse, but it's always about the high profile people and how they were abused. What they don't talk about is the systematic rape of women in prison on a wide scale. Another element that's never talked about is the abuse of women in the MK camps. Maybe I am interested in this because I grew up in a household that was so dominated by women, their suffering and the consequences of their suffering. I think that's what created the impetus for *Bitter Fruit*. The novel doesn't represent any particular political viewpoint, just a whole series of things that I read or experienced. For example I once asked the Truth Commissioner, Fazel Randera, what had happened to the testimonies of women's abuse which had been given in a closed hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He said they had decided not to publish it because of the sensitivity of the material. Then I went onto the internet, and there they were — all of the testimonies, right there, complete with people's names and the details of the incidents. The TRC hadn't wanted to expose those people, whoever they are, and those people didn't want to be exposed — but a simple bureaucratic error had put this thing up on the internet. Although the material was subsequently withdrawn, I felt that as a fictional writer I had to tell a story about it from my viewpoint.

A number of activists that I worked with had been raped and abused in prison and I was close to some of them, though they never spoke about it. When *Bitter Fruit* came out, a number of people called me and thanked me for the story. Others were far more ambivalent and said that I had opened wounds that they had hoped they would never have to deal with. But the fact is that the sexual abuse of women in the struggle against apartheid was far more systematic and widespread than we want to believe or that the TRC has dealt with. It was in many ways on a par with what happened to Kosovo. To teach the community a lesson in a township north of Newcastle in KwaZulu Natal, for example, the police went there and raped every woman they could find. This happened in about 1986. You will not find this in any newspaper — it's not recorded anywhere. Even within the ANC it is the one thing that they will not put in their documentation archives. So all I did was try to redress a viewpoint.

The other fascination was purely an intellectual thought that came to me. What if a child discovers that his father is his mother's rapist? What would he do? That for me was one of the more rewarding exercises for writing the book. I had to put myself into the mind of this young Michael, and work through with him just what will go on in his head and how he will deal with it. I hope I dealt with it sensitively and that his reactions are sensitive. It was the most difficult part of the whole book to try to keep Michael true to himself, to what he was and to his reaction to his mother.

EY *As in Kafka's Curse, the theme of transgressive sexuality allows you to explore the historical hybridity of the nation, the burden of the past in individual's lives and the development of the self (especially of the female self) in bold new directions. To what extent does the experience of the characters in your novels (and especially in Kafka's Curse and Bitter Fruit) mirror a larger cultural process — a process of self-discovery and metamorphosis? And what are the implications of this?*

AD Maybe there was a subconscious desire in my heart to provoke South Africans out of their hypocritical silence about sex. One of the real reasons why there is an AIDS epidemic today is because people don't want to talk about sex — not just traditional communities, but educated people too. The Dutch people taught me a word yesterday: they call it 'fout', like the Afrikaner word 'fout'. But 'fout' is where you declare something a sin almost, and therefore you can't discuss it. So fascism in the Netherlands is 'fout' and therefore they never discuss it. Once you find a fascist in your midst you expel him and you never talk about him again — it's a form of excommunication. Think about South Africans and how hypocritical we are about sex. We make bawdy jokes about it. Pieter Dirk Uys makes blueish puns about it. The movies that we make here are crude. The literature in

South Africa shrinks away from sexuality as well. I think J.M. Coetzee handles it well and Nadine Gordimer always deals with it very subtly — her last book was a very sensual book for me. I don't like the way André Brink deals with sex: in his novels the women are reduced to fantasies, male fantasies. Perhaps in both my books, but more particularly in *Bitter Fruit*, I tried to provoke discussion, and maybe I did. In Afrikaans communities and in urban areas incest has been an unspoken and hugely suppressed problem. It has been like that in some Coloured communities as well, and even in Indian communities — it is never spoken about, especially when incest is also abuse, which it is most of the time. It is very rare when an incestuous relationship between a young person and an older person is consensual. And that is an element of abuse, as well as a reason why people never want to speak about it. A certain Dutch reviewer said I was obsessed with sex in both these books, but I don't think that's true. What I do think is that South Africans treat their bodies as things that you hide or exhibit for the wrong reasons. So yes, I hope that what I do is lead to some transformation, even if it is only to get people to talk about it.

EY *In the epigraph to Part 2 of Bitter Fruit, you quote from Mevlana Celayeddin-I Rumi: 'Since in order to speak, one must first listen, /Learn to speak by listening'. To what extent do you feel your writing depends upon your ability first to listen to people and their experience? And/or the voice of memory?*

AD It's all of it, it's listening to people around you, it's listening to the past, it's listening to history, it's just watching people speak and interact. Very often South Africans listen with a filter: we hear what we want to hear and not what the person is saying. That's why dialogue in this country is so often difficult. While I'm listening to you speak, I'm trying to make up my mind: 'do I want to listen to this or don't I want to listen to this?' I really believe that in the context of *Bitter Fruit* there was a need, a crying need, for those characters to listen to each other. The only person who really listened there was Michael. He listened to each one of the others and even himself. But then he interpreted it in his own way. When he went on his journey through Soweto he kept saying to himself, 'what the hell am I doing here, looking for history in the dusty streets of Soweto?' Even he was trying to listen to his own voice telling him the past is not something that you dwell in all the time — you have to move on into the future.

NOTES

- ¹ Umkhonto weSizwe — 'the spear of the nation' — was the military wing of the then banned African National Congress, the current ruling party in South Africa.

- ² ANC member Robert McBride is a former anti-apartheid guerrilla who planted a car bomb outside Magoo's Bar in Durban in 1986, as the violent struggle against the apartheid government was reaching its climax. The bomb killed three young white women and McBride was sentenced to death. In 1992 he was given amnesty along with 149 other convicts (most of them imprisoned for violent acts in the anti-apartheid cause) by then President F.W. de Klerk in a bid to entice Nelson Mandela's African National Congress back to the multi-party negotiating table. McBride is a controversial figure, not least because of his arrest in 1998 on charges of gun-running in Mozambique, an act said by some to prove the alleged existence of a plot to topple Mandela's ANC government. McBride maintained that he had in fact been investigating gun-running in South Africa and had been falsely accused, and he was released from prison in Mozambique on September 14, 1998.
- ³ ANC: African National Congress. UDF: United Democratic Front.

KEVIN PARRY

World Cup

She stands in the doorway of the lounge, watching him. 'Going where?' she says. In the brutal smudges of mascara her dark eyes brim with tears.

He snorts, raising the glass to his mouth. 'Ask an Afrikaner where he's *going*? Stupid bitch.' He tosses back the last of his drink. 'Where the fuck *is* there to go? Huh?' He wrenches the door of the cabinet open, the family photos and ornaments trembling, and grabs a new bottle of Oudemeester.

'Well then where...?' She stops, flinches, as he turns and lurches across the room towards her.

'Out!' He pushes his face into hers. 'Out! You got me?' And he shoves past her into the kitchen.

She remains standing there, her shadow broken across the doorway, the reek of his brandied breath in her nostrils. Her arms are held loosely over her stomach, slender arms, thin-boned as a bird's.

He comes back into the lounge with three cans of Coke. He tucks the Oudemeester under one arm, bends to pick his empty glass up off the table.

'Hannes ...' her voice a tentative whine. 'You can't *drive* like this. Where you think you going...?'

'Jusus, don't you understand plain Afrikaans? I told you: Out! I dunno where. Anywhere. Nowhere. Jus' don't keep asking, Ryna, hey.' In picking up the glass one of the cans slips. He grabs at it, misses. As it hits the floor he kicks out at it, connects. '*Paale toe!*' he shouts.

'Hannes, no, man...!' The can thuds into the wall next to her head then spins away under the coffee table.

He laughs, a whooping drunken falsetto. 'Heeeeeey, jus' like that boot of Stransky's. Unbelievable, man: last minute of the game, 12—all, an' bang! straight between the posts! Beautifulest drop you ever see in your life. An' that's it, ou pal, over: 15–12! End of story. All Blacks didn't know what hit 'em. Whole blerrie *world* didn't know what hit 'em. Jaaaaa, treating us like dog shit all these years, boycotts, isolation, all that kak ... we showed 'em, man, we showed 'em: World Cup! ... you *hear* what I'm saying? *World Cup!* Best rugby nation in the world! Best blerrie *nation* in the ...'

He's on his knees on the floor, scrabbling for the can, bottle under one arm and clutching the glass and other cans to his chest.

'Ag, please, Hannes, listen ... don't go out ...'

He stands up. 'Jus' shut up, Ryna ... I'm going, I told you ... !'

'What for, man, you too drunk ...'

'What for! What for's for to celebrate, baby, what you think.' He heads for the door. 'I'm going out to celebrate ... greatest rugby ...'

'D'you know what *time* it is? You can't just go out there, on your own, like ...'

'Can't! It's my country this, hey ... I go where I like ... any time I like ...'

'... don't be crazy now ...'

'... *nobody* tells me where I go or where I don't go in my own country, pal ... that's for blerrie sure ...'

'... please ... it's not *safe*, Hannes ... you get ...'

He slams the door on her voice, negotiates the front steps in the orange verandah light ... ja, ja, ja, you get what? ... opens the car door, lays glass, bottle, cans on the passenger seat, starts the car ... you get mugged, robbed, shot ... waits as the security gates swing open, waits, pressing his inner bicep against the revolver ... knifed, carjacked, throat slit, all the usual stuff ... and he accelerates, burning his tyres down the road through the high-walled, razor-wired, guard-dogged, alarmed, utterly still suburb.

Going where? Ja, same place he always goes. Across Beach Road, through the suburbs, Nahoon, Stirling ... everywhere deserted, you'd think there'd be people about, celebrating, dancing in the streets, man ... but no, nobody, just a few blacks hanging round on corners. Ha! Mandela on TV wearing the Bok jersey, what a joke ... only know blerrie soccer, the blacks. Going, without conscious thought, over Bunker's, winding down into the valley, then turning off onto the lonely loop of road that detours through the Glen. Pitch dark through the low enclosing trees, trunks and branches looming in the headlights, shadows circling, and the image of her face, as always, that schoolgirl, just fourteen years old, long blonde hair tendrilled out amongst the fallen leaves where he used to picnic with his parents as a child, her throat cut so deeply that her head was almost completely off. *Fourteen*, man. Ag ja, and so? ... what's a fourteen year old white schoolgirl in this country these days? Bugger all. Rubbish. Raped, slaughtered like a goat ... just par for the course.

Finally he's out into the open and he slows, following the road round to the right, his lights raking the low cement wall that edges the esplanade. He cranes forward, slowing right down, squinting at the wall, looking for the spot ... round about here ... He pulls in, diagonal to the pavement, looks about, turns off the engine. The lights expire on the wall.

Darkness. Stillness. Just the low boom through his open window of the ocean, breakers rolling in, rolling in, the warm air heavy with salt. Jesus, such a night, these sounds, these smells ... of the ocean, of this place. A place to die for, to fucken kill for: *his* place. He sits there, looking about. The silhouette of the wall against the night sky, the black hulk of the Glen trees behind him. He waits. Listens. Looks about. The road is empty except for one other car parked up there, a bit further along. An old white Valiant. Nobody in it. Fisherman, most likely.

He unscrews the bottle of brandy, half fills the glass, tops it with Coke. He draws a long slow mouthful, swallows, O Jesus ja, this stuff ... sits a while longer, absorbing the air, breathing the ocean. Then he gets out and begins to make his way across the pavement, unsteadily ... chuckling whooa boys, more pissed than he thought ... glass out in front of him, trying not to slop. He reaches the wall, leans down, resting his arms on its navel-high coping. The rough friendly still-warm grain of the cement under his hand ... the fingers, the skin of the child he was, stroking it. This place ...

From where he stands he can see, to the right, the long arc of the seafront road curving its two or three kilometres round the bay toward the main city beach, the amusement arcades, coloured lights, hotels, clubs, bars, all that racket, rubbish, menace, everywhere shadowy, quick, angular with blacks. But in the darkness, here, the furthest reach of this deserted little road that circles always back on itself, there's just the stillness, breakers falling unseen into the night. To his left the pavement continues just a short way then peters out under the endless empty beauty of sand and dunes and rocks that stretch away northwards. He takes another long draught ... Cape brandy, sweet and mellow as this salt-laden darkness. Ja, this place: all of him ... everything there *is* of him ... His hand moves along the wall, searching, searching below the coping for the spot ...

Suddenly, behind him, out of the Glen, the roar of acceleration and tyres and he pivots, hand to holster, braced as the crazy headlights swing round the corner, towards, across him, blindingly, engine howling in a too-low gear, hooter rhythmically blasting. Then, the car charging by him, he relaxes, grins: kids, three white kids, hanging out of the windows, shouting, singing, whooping, one of them waving a huge flag, ja the old orange, white and blue. 'Heeey!' he laughs, shouts, 'Heeeeeeey!' raising his glass toward them, 'Stransky! Stransky!' ... executes a few crazy dance steps, drink slopping down his arm ... 'Suid Afrika!' ... and them yelling back, cheering, hooting, flag slapping behind as they tear on down the road, heading for the city, the lights, all that. Ja, the kids are OK still, they're alright, man ... *someone* celebrating, at least, Jesus ... Ja, could be him what, twenty, twenty-five years ago ... him and the boys. Hooooo, those days, man...!

He watches the car till it vanishes, the ocean reclaiming the stillness all about him. He turns back, leans on the wall again, looks out to sea. Stars here and there, he notices, quite bright; and he can just make out the breakers now too, the ghostly white motion of their toppling. The ocean, here, all that remains ... the rest fucked up, all fucked up ...

But no: even here it's not the same. Like, take those kids: where are *they* going? Not here, is for sure. So many people murdered down here ... knifed, cars stolen, women raped, all the usual. That girl back there in the Glen ... Christ, man, fourteen years old. Blonde hair spread in the dirt. Animals. Whole place's

just deserted now. Picnic's over. Just fishermen that come here these days. And him.

But oh man, those days ... all the cars that used to come and park down here at night back then. Bring a chick down, sit in the car and try your luck, like; go down onto the beach if you maybe get lucky. That Meisie Prinsloo ... jusus, tits for Africa, the gorgeous weight of them in his hands. Do with a bit of that right now, in fact. Ja, and then everyone'd end up at the old Windmill roadhouse ... sit in the car, radio blasting, toasted sandwiches and coffee, vodka ... all the ouens: Naude, van Heerden, Beyers, and whichever chicks were around at the time. Meisie. Married, who was it? ... bloke from the Transvaal, policeman. Lost track of them all now; moved, mostly ... Cape Town, Free State, overseas too, a couple of them ... Australia. Geel even went to blerrie England. Just him left here now. Him and poor Naude ... old mate, brother. Ja, Windmill's gone, too. Up to shit, the whole place. But still, no way: he could never go, never leave this place. *Fought* for it, pal, like every generation of his ancestors've had to do. Those barren borders, South West, the endless red dirt of Angola. No, your own country, man, you can't leave it. You can't leave it because it is *you* ...

He's inching along the wall, fingers tracing the edge of the coping again, and there, he's found it, the clod of iron, the little protruding knuckle of the wall's skeleton, swollen and jagged with rust: the exact spot. Ja, your past, your memories and everything, they're what you *are* ... He steadies his glass, eases one leg, then the other, over the wall, sits facing seaward. As he settles there is a sudden startling luminescence, the moon emerging full and silver, heavy clouds around it, a path of light across the ocean and up the gleaming foreshore. And away down there, now, he can make out something, down there to the left where the moonlight catches the waves as they break against the rocky headland ... the fisherman, it must be, a lonely silhouette, knee-deep in the surf, still and concentrated, the arc of his rod taut against the current's tug. Ja, that old snap of his Pa out on the rocks there, a granite statue against the skyline, rod braced, fishing for shark. The memory of him, striding up out of the heavy surf, like the legendary old saviour, Wolraad Woltemade. You learn to know yourself through fishing, through the sea, Pa used to say, you against it ... the line cast into your own soul, you pull up things you maybe never expected to find down there. Old Pa ... strong, handsome, proud Afrikaner. And so long gone, old hero. Loved his country so fiercely, his nation, this place. No: it's better he's not here now, that's for sure. But still, he'd have loved to see one thing, man: the Bokke this day! World Cup, Pa! ... World Cup!

He drains his glass, clambers off the wall, heads for the car to refill ... Stransky! ... dancing, stumbling ... Suid Afrika! He flops into the front seat, gets the bottle. Hey, last one now, jong, getting too smashed ... He pours half a glass, sits there with the door open. Last dop then he'll maybe go and find some action, go cruising, like he and Naude used to do ... The Drosdty, man: that was the place to pick up skirt. Friday nights, Saturdays, the bar packed, you couldn't move. Go in and

down a few Lions, him and Naude, wait for the chicks to come over from the nurses' training college. Whoooo, fast, some of those nurses ... seen it all, man, know what it's all for. Had to be quick though, beat the other buggers into the lounge to chat 'em up ... mini skirts and boots, *jesus* ... big blonde Meisie leaning against the wall there, and the tall redhead Naude got, that song by the Flames playing, yo-our precious loo-oove ... Her heavy, soft tits ...

No, *jusus*, go find some skirt, *ouens* ... he gulps back the neat brandy he's just poured ... *ja ou Naude*, that's the way we used to sink 'em, remember? Hey? OK, here we go boys, here we go again! Stransky ... !

Up the road past the Valiant, onto the long curving bay road. Coloured lights along the esplanade, like when he was a kid. Aquarium, Pa taking him there ... seals, that huge turtle. Quanza pool. He unscrews the bottle between his legs as he drives, takes a swig. The Weavers, there. Esplanade. Orient ... *ja*, and look at 'em milling round there, all blacks ... those *there*, man: the clothes, *takkies*, the *blerrie* hair, all trying to look like American rapper hip-hop arseholes, baseball caps on backwards, *jesus*. And hey, the old Bowl! ... no, what they call it now? ... *Puma's*. Ag, change a place's name but you'll never change what a place was. Swaggering about like they own the place ... know fuck all, wouldn't've lasted two minutes in the old Bowl. Hell, those fights! Old Potgieter hitting that rooinek right over the table for asking his chick for a dance while he was at the bar. And the cops trying to chuck Pottie into the back of the van with some blacks they'd picked up with no passes and Pottie telling the cop to fuck off and jumping up into the front of the van. Cops just laughed, told him to go. Old cinemas gone too ... 20th, Colo. And Oxford Street ... blacks dossing in the doorways. Can't even walk there in the daytime now, pavements so packed with hawkers and stalls. Eh-eh-eeeh, and here the street girls start. *Ja, ja*, swing 'em *mama*, very nice, but no, this pale male's not quite so desperate yet. Fucken AIDS depots.

He turns off into Kimberley Road, pulls in, mounting the kerb. Familiar old run-down street, the columns of the Drosdty's portico at the end there ... *jusus*, he hasn't been here since ... *when* was he last here? No, can't remember. He swigs from the bottle, looks around. Couple of young black street girls in tight minis across the road, arm-in-arm, laughing. Down the far end of the street a few figures, standing, sitting on the pavement, he can't see very well. Checks his holster. Takes another swig ... lips feel numb.

As he gets out one of the girls from across the street calls out, 'Hullo! Hullo! Over here!' He ignores her, begins to stroll down towards the Drosdty, trying to walk straight. Her high heels clip across the road, follow behind him. He walks on.

'Hullo!' Her voice beside him is soft, a child's. Under the streetlight her broad face is violet, her lips dayglo orange; straightened hair like a helmet.

'Hullo. Sir? Are you wanting something?'

'Go, get away from me.'

She tries to speak in Afrikaans. 'Jy like vir me, baas?'

'No I don't blerrie like you.'

'Awu, I be very nice for you, my baas?'

'Leave me alone, jong'

'You going to like me, baas.'

'Jus' get away here, before I blerrie *kick* you...!'

She continues alongside him a little way, then she slows, stops, leans back against a wall, watches him.

He ambles on toward the columns. Three black men are sitting on the kerb sharing a bottle, talking, laughing. Behind them, on the unlit steps of the portico, five or six others stand, sit. They stop talking, watch as he approaches. He holds his left arm out slightly, away from his holster, begins to mount the steps.

'What you want?' The man is on the top step above him.

'What? I'm going to have a drink, what the hell you think?'

They stare at him, begin to talk in Xhosa.

He continues up the steps, 'Excuse!' But the men do not move. 'I said, excuse me.' They're all silent now. He stares up at the man in front of him. 'You *hear* me, hey?'

'What you want here?' the man says.

'I wanna fucken drink, I told you.'

'There's no drink here.'

'Why there's no drink?' He sways, staring up into the man's eyes. 'This's the Drosdty, nê?'

""Drosdty""? They talk Xhosa again, begin laughing. A tall thin man with a cigarette stuck on his lip steps up to him, talks straight into his face: 'Hey: no more Drosdty, you hear: this is where we live.'

He stands there, unsteady, numb, face to face with the man. They all watch him, silent. And everything has lapsed, time, place, darkness, all a monotone droning in his brain, his consciousness held only by the thin gash of streetlight ticking in the man's black eyes. Then, slowly, he detaches, turns, begins to trudge back down the steps. He reaches the bottom, walks a few heavy paces along the pavement, stops, turns to face them again. He stands there, swaying, staring at them. Then suddenly, hands out in front of him, he takes one ... two ... three measured steps toward them and executes, in exaggerated slow-motion, a gigantic drop-kick, staggers backwards off-balance, recovers, peers up into the night sky. Quite still, they all watch him. He totters a little, pointing at the ball sailing up, up, up and over, a distant speck spinning above the towering uprights of the posts. It is every Springbok ball he's ever seen soaring over the crossbar, from the grainy newsreels of early legends, to Visagie and Botha, to the digital magnificence of Stransky, and there in the vast roaring arena he stands, pointing up, following the trajectory of the ball's slow fabulous flight until eventually it slackens, falters and fails, falling, falling, finally to earth. All about him is absolute stillness. He

stands there a minute, then looks up from the dark pavement, faces the silent semi-circle of men, looks at each one of them in turn, nodding his head slowly: 'You see that?' he slurs. '*You ... see ... that?*' Then he turns his back on them and begins to make his way crookedly back up the road. He is a long way off before he hears their guffawing and whooping.

She is waiting at the car for him. He doesn't look at her.

'You want I come with you, baas?'

He fumbles with his keys, unlocks the door.

'Very very nice, baas. Only fifty rand.'

He slumps back into the seat, shuts the door. He reaches over for the bottle. Her face is at the window, her thin fingers with their bright orange nails tapping, tapping. 'Fifty rand, sir?'

He takes a long swig. Another. He leans back against the headrest, wipes the back of his hand several times across his eyes, his nose.

The tap-tapping of her nails. 'Twenty rand, oh please my baas ... only twenty ...'

* * *

Moon gone now, ocean dark. But still a few stars. He squints ... ja, can just about discern the form of the fisherman ... there, against the white of the breakers as they tumble. Noble curve of the rod. Exact same spot, still ... must've been there hours. He drains his glass, peers at his watch. No, can't make it out. His head swirls, tongue's thick. The air absorbing the ocean's coldness now. His eyes droop, head nods, sinks, the short shoves of his breath louder in his ears than the surf. Must go ... must go ... sit in the car for a bit ...

He falls into the seat, pulling the door shut, slumps back, his brain humming, car beginning to whirl, whirl him, whirling, whirling him faster and wider hang on hang on hang on hang ...

Panic like a blow to the skull snaps him up in the seat staring wildly around him, about him, ahead, through the windscreen, and there in the darkness, there it is, there, right there: the tall figure, in front of the car, quite still, standing, watching him. He jerks forward, fumbling at his holster, hand clasping the butt. The figure doesn't move, remains standing there in the dark, watching him through the glass. Gun's in his hand now, below the dashboard, safety catch off, his brain reeling.

Then through the open window he hears the quiet, quizzical voice: 'Gooienaand'; sees the fishing rod over one shoulder, canvas knapsack over the other. 'O jusus,' he mouths through parched lips, relaxes fractionally back into his seat, panting '... O jusus ... jusus ...'

The fisherman moves slowly round to the open window. 'You OK there?'

'God you give me such a fucken fright, hey ... I nearly ...'

'It's OK, man, take it easy, I just come up off the beach ...'

'... nee god, ou ... I jus' looked up and there you standing, hey ...'

The man's chuckle is silky, 'Sorry, sorry ... relax. I saw you sitting in there ... I's just checking you're OK, like.'

He's out of the seat now, Beretta still in his hand. 'Ready to fucken shoot you here, ou ...!' he coughs a laugh.

'Whoa, jong: Afrikaners can't afford to shoot each other! We gotta stick together, man!'

'Ja, ja ... jesus ...' He clicks the safety catch on, returns the gun to holster, his heart still pounding. 'But hey, man,' talking slower now, mouth parched, trying to master his heavy slurring '... how you get up here so quick? I jus' looked and seen you fishing, right down there by the rocks ...'

'No, I been over the other side, toward the Quanza. I haven't seen anybody else down here tonight.'

'Ja, man, down by the *rocks* there's a guy, he's been there forever.'

'Well, no, I dunno. Like I say, I didn't see anybody.'

'Is't *your* Valiant parked along there then?'

'No, I walked down. I live here in the Quigney, just up the road.'

'God, I mus' grab another drink ... calm my nerves, like! You frightened me nearly blerrie sober, man!' He reaches in, gets the glass and bottle, pours. 'So anyways, you have any bites ... bites down there?'

'Ag, nothing much.' The fisherman taps his rucksack: 'Couple of small ones, only ... blacktail.'

'Eeeeee, blacktail! Blacktail's lovely in the pan, ou ... bit of butter ... jusus!'

'For sure, for sure. You fish here then?'

'No, not for ... how many years? *Used* to, me and my ol' Pa, back in the '60s, '70s. Good stuff out here then, hey ... best rock fishing in the world, this coast: kob, grunter, steenbras ...'

'Ha, steenbras! I never heard of a steenbras landed round here for must be ten years, man. Whole place's fished out, polluted, I dunno what. Fished out, I reckon. I mean, you come down here in the early morning, like any time between four o'clock and sun-up, and it's just jam-packed, hey ... blacks, of course ... fished the whole place empty.'

'Heeeeh man, they got all the jobs ... they got all the fish ... hey...?'

'For sure, for sure, those old days are gone.'

'Ja well fuck it, man, only thing matters ... only thing matters is, we won the rugby today. D'you see it, hey? That Stransky? D'you *see* it...?'

'Ja, I heard ...'

'... *Stransky*, man ... drop in the final minute, you never seen anything like it ... ja, World Cup, ou maat ... 15-12!' He tosses back a mouthful of brandy, some spilling down his neck. 'Hey, here: come on: take a dop ... celebrate, man,' wiping his chin. 'Come on: best in the whole fucken world!'

The angler leans his rod against the car. 'OK: Vrystaat! Ai, good stuff, dankie.' He hands the glass back. 'So anyway, what you do down here?'

'Me? Ag, man, I jus' come and sit. Watch the ocean. You know...?'

'Ja? So, what ... are you looking for something, like...?'

'No, I just, *like* it down here. This's my *spot* here, man. You know...?'

'Uhuh. But perhaps maybe you waiting for somebody?'

'Hey? No, no, I come here a lot, just me on my own ... I comes and sits, on the wall there. Always to this place ... exact same spot on the wall, here ... come look, I show you ... over here ... ' He stumbles over to the wall, glass in hand, peers down into the darkness, feeling under the coping, ' ... just about ... along here ... '

The fisherman follows behind him. 'What is it there?'

'Wait, it's just ... ja, here's it, come feel ... right here, you feel it? You feel that...?'

'Ja ... ? So, what is it...?'

'Man, it's jus' a bit of iron, like, is all. Mad, hey? But listen, you see, I got this old photo, that my Ma took of me when I was, what, maybe three years old ... just three, hey ... short pants and everything, just a little outjie, sitting here, on this wall, eating a sandwich ... and I mean *sitting right here*, OK, 'cause in the photo, you can see this exact same bit of iron, sticking out. And there's the bay, aaaaall behind me back there, in the picture ... and ... well, that little outjie ... me, you know ... Ag, man, how can I explain...?'

The angler's voice is gentle: 'You lonely, I think. Hey? Am I right?'

'Man, I just, I like to just ... come and sit here, on my own, you know? ... think how things used to be, when I was a kid and stuff, my Ma and Pa, how everything was ... Ag well, you know how it's ... everything so changed now, everything, fucked up ... '

'Ja, I know, I know, for sure ... '

' ... and, that photo ... well I jus' fucken *love* this place, man. You can understand that, hey? I mean, this place's the first place I can remember, ever seeing in my life, and ... well jusus I dunno ... that little kid in the photo, that kid that was me ... that *is* me, *still* ... you jus' gotta hold on to something, you know? ... gotta have something that's still true, to believe in ... 'cause what else is there, man ... what else...? Ag jusus I'm sorry ... '

'Hey, it's OK,' the fisherman puts his arm around him, grips his shoulder, 'it's OK, it's OK ... '

'Sorry ... god ... ' He coughs, sniffs, turns away from the fisherman, leans on the wall.

'No, I understand. I do. I'm sensitive that way too, you know.'

' ... dunno what's wrong with me ... so blerrie, pissed ... ' He drains what's left in the glass.

'No, it's OK. Really. I mean, I get lonely also, things changing and ... well, we all need someone ... '

'What I need, man, 's another drop. Come on, bugger this all, let's get a doppie, jong ... ' He lurches toward the car, drops heavily into the front seat, gets the bottle.

The fisherman follows, leans on the door. 'Hey, listen, you mustn't feel embarrassed, you know. It's good to talk about things ... I can maybe help.'

'No, here, man ... ' he swallows a mouthful, passes the glass. 'Grab some. Good Kaapse brandewyn! Then tell you what, I tell you what: we go hit the Drosdty, hey ... ' He flops his head back against the headrest. 'No, man, I mean ... not the Drosdty ... where...? Drosdty's gone, ou ... '

The angler squats down, hands the glass back. 'Listen, why don't we just go back to my place, just up the road here, a few minutes. We can ... '

'No, no, no, man, the Drosdty ... me and old Naude, man ... at the Drostdy ... chicks, hey, chicks up there to make your balls ache, pal ... did you never been to...?'

'Hey come on,' the fisherman's voice is soft and lingering, his hand on the other's leg, 'come back to my place ... '

'Hey ... '

'... come on, we can talk,' his hand moving up the thigh, slowly, caressing, '... get to know each other...?'

'Hey, man, listen here ... '

'Let me comfort you ... ' Hand on the crutch now, kneading, his voice an urgent whisper, 'ja, come on, we can comfort each other ... '

Striking out, smashing the glass into the fisherman's face, '*You blerrie moer ...!*' kicking at him as he reels away onto the pavement. '*What you take me for a fucken tail-gunner, hey! Hey?*' Clambering out of the car, fumbling his gun out of its holster. The fisherman grabbing his rod and bag, stumbling backwards across the road, toward the Glen.

'Ok, take it easy, I'm sorry, hey, I'm sorry ... I just ... '

'Fucken shoot you, hey ... I fucken shoot you here and now you blerrie scum shit ... '

The fisherman on the other side of the road, backing off, still facing him through the darkness, 'I'm sorry ... sorry ... ' Backing into the blackness of the trees, 'I'm sorry ... '

'Blerrie rubbish, just keep going, just keep going the fuck outta here, you trash ... you blerrie ... Go on, voetsek! *Voetsek!*'

A scrambling through undergrowth, receding footfalls snapping twigs, then the weight of the darkness and silence sinking down like lead on his reeling senses. He stands there in the middle of the road, swaying, breath rasping in his throat, gun pointing unsteadily into the black formlessness of the Glen. Behind him the boom of breakers, the thin hiss of the surf, reach him slow and waveringly from a distant universe. He waits, listening, panting hard, trash, fucken trash, an Afrikaner ... Listens. Stillness. He staggers slowly backwards, eyes still on the

Glen, shoes crunching over the broken glass, trash, trash ... He turns, stumbles into the kerb, goes sprawling across the pavement. He raises himself a little, manoeuvres back, sits propped against the wall, gun in hand. Afrikaner. Trash ... trash ... Closes his eyes, spinning, spinning into blackness ...

* * *

This door? He limps up the steps. There is no light, he can't make it out. He tries the handle, pushes. It opens. A single lamp in the corner of the dark lounge. Beneath it sits Ryna. He stares at her. Her eyes are black lagoons in the unearthly whiteness of her face. 'Do you know what *time* it is?' she says. He looks at his watch. The glass is shattered, the face crushed. His hand, he sees, is lacerated, thickly matted with blood. He stares at it. Then he begins to weep, seeing again Naude lying there beside the mortar crater, smiling, his guts slopped out into the red dirt. 'Naude ...' he says, 'Naude's dead ...' She stares at him. 'I know,' she says, 'but me, what about me?' He cannot stop weeping. 'Well how can we bury him now? There's no flag to bury him in now.' Her eyes are cavernous. 'D'you know what *time* it is?' she says. 'Jesus,' he cries and staggers out of the room, sobbing, through the kitchen, into the garden. After a moment he can make out in the darkness a figure, standing there in the middle of the lawn. He approaches, slowly, amazed. 'Is it *you*, Pa? Is it *you*?' The man turns slowly to look at him. 'Ja, it's me, boet.' How old he looks, how frail. 'Pa,' he says, still weeping, 'Pa, what will we *do*? ... there's no flag to bury him in, there's no earth to bury him in.' 'Ag, my boy, my boy,' the lost familiar old voice so comforting, 'we will find them, you know; we have always found what is needed.' He points ahead into the darkness, 'There, now, you see: look!' 'Where, Pa? Where?' But his father is gone. He looks around. Then he sees it, the dark ocean that stretches away before him. And suddenly there is a long blade of light across the water and a figure walking, a man, wading through the waves towards him, a fisherman, striding through the heavy surf, up the shore, onto the lawn. And in his powerful arms he cradles something, something that gleams in the strange light, a fish, it looks like, a huge silver steenbras. The fisherman bends, lays it on the grass, then is suddenly gone. He is alone. Everything is still. He looks down. On the grass at his feet lies a swaddled drenched form. He kneels down, begins, layer by sopping layer, to unravel, unwrap the sheet until she is there, entirely revealed. Her naked young body is immaculate, seeming to glow from within, the smooth golden skin, legs, arms, cheeks tinged with finest down; her eyes, open, are an intense cobalt blue; a faint seraphic smile lingers on her perfect child's lips. He touches her. Cold, she is. Cold as the sea. And he begins to sob again, slipping one hand carefully under her slender thighs, the other under her back, gently begins to lift her in his arms, watching how the tiny drops of water tremble on her fine eyelashes, how her blonde hair haloes behind the sudden ferocious sunset of her throat as her head topples back.

* * *

He struggles, lifts himself up onto one elbow. Retching grips him like a vice, holds him till he's breathless, releases him to choke up a thin gob of bile. Trembling shakes every limb, he cannot think how to control it. Slowly, painfully, he lifts himself a little further, props himself up. Dehydration rages in him like a madness. He retches again, long and exhausting. Nothing. And again. Nothing. Sits back, soaked in cold sweat, trembling. Hollow scouring of his breath; and behind it another rhythm, the long slow throb and crawl of the ocean.

He opens his eyes. Misty grey of early dawn through his tears. Blur of trees. Road. His car, door open, cab light on. Pavement. Beside him his Beretta, a puddle of vomit, its stench mingling with the heavy rolling smell of the sea. Up the road, the vague white form of the Valiant in the mist, still there.

He pushes against the wall, slowly hauls himself up. Fog heavy on the water, but an ambience of dawn seeping through, beginning to tint the dark ochre of the sand, the grey-green and cream of the surf. He looks out toward the rocks on the left, looks for the fisherman. No one. No sign.

He walks slowly, painfully, hand trailing along the top of the wall, to the end of the pavement and down onto the sand, takes off his shoes, socks. The sand crisp, cold, under soles, between his toes. He walks on down to the water's edge. The long strand is deserted and still. He takes off his shirt, empty holster, trousers, underpants, drops them at the tide line and walks into the icy water, up to his ankles, his shins, a little deeper. Then he sinks down onto his knees, puts his hands together and cups water over his face, his head, rinses his mouth, drinks two, three mouthfuls of the heavy, cleansing water. Then he sits back on his haunches, facing out to sea, and watches the small green swells, one after another, topple and fizz forward, leaping up his chest, frothing around him. He remains kneeling there a long time, quite still, until he is numb with cold, remains until he can feel almost nothing. Then he rises, walks slowly back to where his clothes are and sits down.

The fog has begun to lift. Threads of orange along the horizon, across the bay. To the left the mist has gone from the rocks, which gleam a sleek wet black. Still no sign of the fisherman. He waits, watches the swells roll in, build, suddenly collapse and sheet up over the sand towards him. He watches for a long time, without focus, without thought. Then, against the gathering light, as the water washes back, he is suddenly aware of them: the little sharp green turret shells of the snails, furrowing the water as they cling against the backwash, little craters forming around them in the sand. Then, in the glistening stillness before the next wave's sweep, on they forge, up over the wet mirror of the shore. He sits there and watches them, wave after wave, thinks how primitive they are, how immensely old; thinks of the millions upon millions of years they must have been here, almost since these shores were formed, clinging on against the tides of this ocean, scavenging for whatever morsels the next wave might bring.

SIMON LEWIS

If the Zoot Fits, Wear It: The Democratic Potential of Demotic Language in Twenty-First Century South Africa

Post-apartheid South Africa is emerging politically and economically as a kind of go-between — a relatively poor link to the richer nations of the West (or North, or First World — however one formulates them), and a relatively rich link to the poorer nations of Africa. As such, there are at least two major forces operating on it: forces pushing it to integrate as a player in a global capitalist order, and forces driving it to lead a specifically African Renaissance. These forces are not new, exactly; rather, they are exemplary of the problems of all newly independent African nations caught between the rock of global power and the hard place of national autonomy. In almost all cases, the economic and political forces are reflected culturally by forces affecting languages, forces that, on the one hand, draw African nations and individual Africans to adopt ‘international’ languages as their official language, and forces that, on the other hand, draw African nations and individual Africans to promote and preserve indigenous languages. In the latter category, no one has more eloquently and passionately set out a case for using indigenous languages as *the* tool for cultural assertion and ultimate liberation than the Gikuyu Kenyan novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o.¹

However, while the economic and political forces operating on newly independent South Africa may be similar to those operating in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa, the linguistic battle in South Africa is complicated by the presence of an indigenous hybrid, Afrikaans — an indigenous hybrid with a long history as a written language, to boot, producing both literature and laws, and thereby associated with the internal colonialism and racial domination of apartheid. Although it might seem counter-intuitive, this paper suggests that the best chance there might be for a national language of the new South Africa might be deracialised Afrikaans, a further creolisation of the language into what I am calling ‘Zoot Afrikaans’.

* * *

There is an intriguing moment in Mickey Dube’s 1998 film of Alex la Guma’s 1962 short novel, *A Walk in the Night*, where the film-makers have conflated two scenes concerning language and foreignness in South Africa. In the opening scene of la Guma’s text, set in and around District Six in Cape Town, Mikey Adonis is

served, without incident, by a character identified only as a 'Swahili waiter' (4). Much later in the novella the drunken Willieboy picks a fight with three American sailors in Gipsy's brothel, angered that these 'foreigners' should be 'messing with our girls' (54, 55). The movie version, shifted temporally to post-apartheid South Africa and geographically to Johannesburg, conflates these two scenes, and shows Mikey, angered at being fired from his job, lashing out verbally at the waiter, whose lack of understanding of Afrikaans marks him as a foreigner. In what might be a rather sly joke, the movie gives this linguistic outsider a name — none other than Ngugi.

In the thirty-something years that separate these two versions, arguments have raged about language, its role in nationalism, and its ethnocentric and ideological biases. In South Africa, by the time La Guma was writing *A Walk in the Night* — in English, despite representing Afrikaans-speaking characters — Afrikaans had recently reached the peak of its official authority with the establishment in 1961 of the Republic of South Africa. Not only did that imagined national community represent (to itself) the triumph of white-skinned South Africans over darker ones, it also represented the long-delayed reversal of the defeat by one white language community (the Afrikaners) by another (the English) in the South African War of 1899–1902. During the apartheid years, the identification of Afrikaans with whiteness first tightened — notably in the destruction of those polyglot, mixed race enclaves of District Six in Cape Town and Sophiatown in Johannesburg — and then beganto unravel again. Subsequently, the creole, impure nature of Afrikaans began to offer implicit and explicit critique of apartheid notions of racial purity. Marlene van Niekerk's Noma award-winning novel *Triomf* (1994), whose publication coincided almost exactly with the onset of the post-apartheid era, probed apartheid's racial mythology and the National Party's deliberately deceptive deployment of the idea of whiteness in order to gain and maintain power between 1948 and 1994.

The ironically titled *Triomf* hammers the last nail into the coffin of the myth of a monolithic white, Christian, patriarchal, National Party-supporting Afrikanerdom. It does so by detailing the lives of a viciously dysfunctional and pathetically incestuous family, the Benades, consisting of an unholy trinity — father (Pop), son (Lambert), and unholy ghost (Treppie) — with Mol as a serially violated Mary. With a penurious origin in the depression of the 1930s, the Benades are just barely getting by in the white Johannesburg suburb hubristically called *Triomf* (Afrikaans for 'triumph') that apartheid town-planners had erected over the ruins of Sophiatown, the near-legendary mixed township central to the writers of the '*Drum* decade'.² More significantly, it does so by using a carnivalesque narrative style couched in a version of highly impure Afrikaans — one critic called it 'copulative-scatological' (cited in Viljoen 249) — that slips between languages and registers with dazzling effect. In the same way that Sophiatown had given rise to a 'new' hybrid *tsotsitaal*, named after the sharp young *tsotsis*

[gangsters] whose zoot suits gave them *their* name, so van Niekerk's *Triomf* opens the way for a streetwise Zoot African language that strips Afrikaans of its exclusively white sense of propriety and appropriation and returns it to its very origins as local creole, a potentially national language that, like South Africa's new democracy, is constantly in the making.

This claim may sound bizarre given the consolidation of Afrikaans as the official language of apartheid over the last half-century, but it is less bizarre when one considers the origin of the language more than three centuries ago, and the probability that the first written Afrikaans was produced in Arabic script to represent the language of the Cape Malay community,³ or when one considers the further creolisation that occurred at the frayed boundaries of apartheid, notably in the 1950s, and particularly in those mixed urban areas of Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District 6 in Cape Town. With the removal of formal segregation in South Africa, as Paul Slabolepszy's character, Stix, puts it, 'Soweto has come to town' (121),⁴ and such areas are now just as polyglot as they ever were; with racial discrimination now illegal rather than the guiding legal principle, contemporary South African writers of all races now face fascinating challenges to re-establish the continuity of translingual innovation that made Sophiatown and District 6 rough and ready models of the racial hodgepodge optimists call the rainbow nation.

Marlene van Niekerk has embraced this challenge with spectacular success. Two crucial scenes in *Triomf* bring the questions of racial and linguistic purity into particularly tight focus. In the first of these, Lambert, disturbed by an encounter with two AWB recruiters near the municipal dump where he has been scavenging, suffers a mild fit and is rescued from the oncoming garbage trucks by a black drifter called Sonnyboy, but to call Sonnyboy black or a drifter — or even Sonnyboy — is to assume a fixity of identity or to conform to ideologies of racial, cultural and linguistic identity that the passage undercuts. Van Niekerk's original text has Sonnyboy speaking mainly in English but slipping into Afrikaans and using the occasional Xhosa word; Lambert meantime also attempts to speak English, even going so far as to translate the place-name *Triomf* (211). In van Niekerk's original text, Sonnyboy's linguistic fluidity, and the fact that he starts off asking the questions, puts Lambert at a disadvantage, the same sort of disadvantage that Africans very frequently had endured under European rule. Van Niekerk represents Lambert's English as 'broken' in the same way that many European writers represented Africans' speech as broken or sub-standard, with all the obvious negative overtones connoted by that. As Sonnyboy goes on though, having won more of Lambert's confidence, he uses a mixture of Afrikaans and English ('daai's nou my luck ... toe kry ek 'n room in Bosmont' [212]) and Lambert goes back to his already rather impure Afrikaans as well as his broken English. The original text, therefore emphasises the similarity and mutual comprehensibility of the language or languages Sonnyboy and Lambert speak. Rather than speaking

languages that are distinct because of essential racial difference Sonnyboy and Lambert's immediate material surroundings in a postmodern urban setting, and their particular class positions (notably their restricted formal educations), force them to speak a shared language, less a nationally or ethnically definitive language perhaps than a class-bound register marked by slang, obscenity, and profanity. Van Niekerk then highlights this linguistic similarity not only by having Lambert struggle to classify Sonnyboy by race (because Sonnyboy is too yellow, Lambert cannot simply tell by looking [212]), but by giving Sonnyboy a pair of reflector shades. The shades obstruct Lambert's ability to figure Sonnyboy out but, more importantly, they reflect what he, Lambert, is. Rather than being Lambert's racial and linguistic other, implies van Niekerk, Sonnyboy is closer to being Lambert's 'Los' double — both are neglected strays at the margins of South African society.

The culminating scene in which Lambert attempts to entertain the prostitute that his brother Treppie has hired for him as a 40th birthday present, similarly shows that the woman's colouredness does not substantially differentiate her from Lambert. She switches from English to Afrikaans, and laughs at Lambert for thinking she was a 'Creole from Creolia or someplace' (Van Niekerk/de Kock 447). 'Of course I can speak Afrikaans', she says: 'Lat ek vir djou se, Mister Ballroom Champ, is ma just a lekker coffee-colour dolly what can mix her languages' (449). Lambert tells himself, still assuming white superiority, that 'a bit of the dark stuff is no problem for him', and he is outraged when she tells him, 'You're not even white, man, you're a fucken backward piece of low-class shit, that's what you are. Useless fucken white trash' (448). The encounter goes from bad to worse, and Mary finally pulls Lambert's pants down but only as a means to disable him, effectively hobbling him with his own underpants.

The symbolism in these two scenes is clear enough, but the linguistic subtlety is hard to catch in translation. In a work-in-progress published in *Illuminations*' 1998 special issue on South African literature, Leon de Kock retained Sonnyboy's language almost verbatim and even keeps the distinction between Lambert's use of English and Afrikaans as the scene progresses.⁶ This, of course, would be peculiar in a translation of the full novel, as its logic would imply that all the dialogue ought to be in the original language. Indeed, the logic pushing de Kock the other way for the international version published by Little, Brown in 1999 insisted that a translation should translate, so that the published book has the entire exchange in English with only one or two local South African slang terms (interestingly enough, the derogatory 'kaffir' appears to need no gloss, while Sonnyboy's one Africanism 'pola' is retained).⁷ Ultimately, however, the translation loses the linguistic awkwardness of Lambert's opening position in the encounter, and his discomfort and disadvantage emerge only as a result of his physical dependency on Sonnyboy's assistance.

As translator, de Kock discovered a number of other difficulties rendering *Triomf* into English, especially for monolingual, non-South African readers. Van

Niekerk's original novel is a raucous garish book full of extra-lingual noise and clatter like a manic animated movie with the soundtrack turned up so loud it makes the cinema seats vibrate. Scarcely a page goes by without van Niekerk trying to catch the sound of things breaking, fireworks exploding, wooden floor blocks clicking, dogs' tails knocking against furniture, Coke cans opening, beer bottles spraying, or Treppie 'ghloob-ghloobing' back a shot of Klipdrif brandy. It would be very easy to imagine a 'translation' of *Triomf* as comic book, in fact, with the sound effects written into the cartoon panels, and some of the comedy of the novel has a similarly comic-book feel. The scene in which Treppie goes out into the street one night to get all the dogs of Triomf barking stands out as a particularly comic example, as does the scene in which Lambert disturbs the bees when trying to fix the roof of 127 Martha Street. Van Niekerk describes Lambert 'sprinting round the side of the house, with Gerty on his heels, his mouth opening and closing. The bees were clogged in a black swarm around his head. ... Treppie meanwhile was running in circles on the roof' (Van Niekerk/de Kock 143). Later, in the Walpurgisnacht scene between Lambert and the prostitute and finally in the election day scene in which Pop dies, the comedy is very dark indeed, but the sheer hyperbole of Lambert's actions in this last instance — breaking Treppie's fingers, smashing Pop over the head, and stabbing Mol — is balanced against the absurdity of his then breaking his own leg while trying to kick the dog Toby. This last scene also lends itself to very clear visualisation of symbol, with the house inside and out being draped while the workmen of Wonder Wall Paints prepare to spray the entire place white.

The vividness of this and other scenes seems to come straight out of the pages of comic-book representations of street-life as featured by *Drum* magazine from the 1950s on. The *Drum* editors revelled in the linguistic impurity of *tsotsitaal*, setting it in a context of boisterous defiance in gangsterism, big-shotism, and, almost inevitably it seems, sexism.⁸ *Triomf*, which repeatedly points out that the events it describes take place on the very same earth as that of the vibrant polyglot Sophiatown that the *Drum* writers celebrated, shows that in many ways the bulldozing of Kofifi (the affectionate local name for Sophiatown) and its replacement by the white suburb of Triomf could not finally overcome the entropic force of Sophiatown. In fact, Sophiatown is to Triomf what Sonnyboy is to Lambert — they are reflector-shade versions of each other.

While T.S. Eliot famously thought it the role of a poet to purify the dialect of the tribe, this essay praises impurity precisely as a means to move beyond tribalism. Eliot too, however, before his elevation to the high-priesthood of high culture, had recognised the potential of the demotic,⁹ and in the contemporary wastelands of postmodern urban South Africa Zoot, Afrikaans is perfectly capable of the sort of lyricism necessary for a language to have status and self-respect. Even in their marginalised lives on a ruinous dump the Benades have their moments of lyricism and transcendence. For example, Pop's surreal and apparently telepathic dream

of dog heaven (181–92, 213–27) is comical and lyrical, pathetic and beautiful at the same time; in his dream he and Mol are among the stars in dog-heaven where

The stars all have points in a circle, but actually they're postboxes with a mouth so you can post letters to your loved ones on earth. In fact, they're two-way postboxes with doors at the back that you can open, and every day you get mail from your people on earth. Every day we get letters from people we don't know, but they say they're family of ours. Then we read them to each other. Dogs can read too in heaven, you know. The letters are full of nice news from the world below.

(Van Niekerk/de Kock 217)

More importantly, van Niekerk has given to the viciously clever Treppie an insightful critique of the vapid officialese that characterises most of the linguistic-nationalist fashioning of the political, religious, and media establishments. Recognising the empty rhetoric of Afrikaner nationalism throughout his life — in the re-enactment of the Great Trek in 1938, in Malan's redeployment of the Great Trek in the crucial election win in 1948, in the constant harking on the family as cornerstone of the Volk during the apartheid years — Treppie disdains the 'wallpaper' language that National Party politicians used to create and dupe their Afrikaner constituency. He also disdains the anodyne 'wallpaper' images of advertising, which similarly interpellate their audience, offering substanceless images of well-being and happiness. Linking the two interpellations, Treppie scathingly rejects the 'new' National Party campaign rhetoric in the first fully multi-racial election of 1994, which he sees as 'the same old rubbish recycled under a new name. But the rubbish itself is a brandless substance' (361). The debasement and poverty of the Benades' own lives completely belie both the political and the consumerist rhetoric. As Eve Bertelsen explains, '[t]he idea most mercilessly parodied in *Triomf* is that of purity, here, the sacred Afrikaner notion of "eie" (as in own culture, volk and family). By literally acting out its precept, the Benades push "eie" to absurdity: they are decisively self-propagating, self-sufficient, and self-destructive' (n.p.)

Strangely enough, Treppie's critique of the 'wallpaper' blandness of establishment-speak resonates with a more recent novel where, at first sight, the critique of language seems to be completely reversed.¹⁰ In Ivan Vladislavic's *The Restless Supermarket*, published in 2001, but set, like *Triomf*, in the period immediately preceding the 1994 elections and in the rapidly changing demography of suburban Johannesburg, the narrator Aubrey Tearle is a stereotypically pedantic retired proof reader who bemoans the lack of precision that arises when people fail to use language correctly (for example, in describing a supermarket as 'restless' to mean that it is never closed). There are numerous points of comparison between Vladislavic's novel and *Triomf*, notably in the novel's climactic scene in which the self-deluded, intellectually arrogant, purity-obsessed Aubrey ends up spending the night walking around the demographically shifting Johannesburg with a woman of indeterminate race whose first name, Shirilaine, is a 'portmanteau' (289), and

whose last name is 'Brown. True enough' (284), and 'the precise shade of [whose] skin' troubles the pedantic Tearle: 'The obvious choices had adjectives clinging to them, like swatches from the do-it-yourself counter, tropical sands, amber dawn. But it was more like fudge' (296). Despite his still-racist shafts of wit, Tearle, in these final scenes, comes to recognise Shirlaine's better qualities and appears to achieve some sort of humility about his own position and his own passion for purity. In a final epiphany, he recognises at last that the old order — linguistic, political, and demographic — is over; looking out over a distinctly *Triomf*-esque urban landscape of 'mining wasteland, and beyond them the southern suburbs, the buffer zones, filling up with informal settlements, and the townships' he acknowledges that 'Movements were afoot in those dark spaces that would never be reflected in the telephone directories. Languages were spoken there that I would never put to the proof' (304). The future belongs to the portmanteau.

Clearly Zoot Afrikaans could not be the language of officialdom or of the law as principles of civility would rule out members of parliament talking about bills in the scatological-reproductive language prevalent in *Triomf*, and the rule of law could not operate without clear definitions of terms. It might nevertheless be a unifying, anti-elitist force among the South African urban working class that keeps politicians honest, whether they push globalisation through the medium of English or factionalism through the promotion of apparently pure and separate local languages. To be able to do so, however, this new hybrid needs to gain some sort of public recognition, and the implications of adopting some form of new vernacular nation language for publishing and education may be impossibly complicated. Quite apart from a likely dearth of government support, the whole publishing and education system is geared to recognisably different languages that one can more or less adequately translate into other recognisably different languages. The hope therefore lies in independent organisations, and it would be great to see writers' groups and publishing houses like Queillerie (which published *Triomf*) or Kwela Books promoting even more linguistically transgressive texts, texts that resist the anodyne wallpaper effect of interpellation by international market forces or by local politicians.¹¹ Such texts might not have much of a market outside South Africa, but in asserting South Africa's national difference — whether from Americans or Kenyans — surely it makes sense that a twenty-first century Alex la Guma should no longer feel constrained to translate himself into a language that, as Ngugi argues, comes so laden with alien cultural baggage that it cannot truly express his specific community, history and relationship to the world (Ngugi 16).

NOTES

¹ See *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.

² Founded in 1951 *Drum* magazine became the most significant medium of expression for a generation of black South African writers, including Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba,

Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane, and Ezekiel Mphahlele. Nkosi writes of the fifties as a 'fabulous decade', and, while more sober assessments of the magazine's brashly commercial irresponsibility and sexism have surfaced in recent years, all literary and social historians acknowledge the magazine's centrality to the assertion of an emergent urban black identity that countered the Verwoerdian ideals of apartheid both in theory and practice (see Nkosi, Chapman, Driver).

- ³ On the origins of written Afrikaans see Davids, or Worden, van Heyningen, and Bickford-Smith. The term Malay is something of a misnomer (see Worden, et al. 127, and Kruger 113), but is still in widespread use to describe the generally Coloured, generally Islamic population of Cape Town dating from the eighteenth century importation of slaves and workers from the Dutch East Indies and Dutch possessions in India itself.
- ⁴ Slabolepszy's *Mooi Street Moves* (Graver 113–53) uses English as its primary language but tells the story of white, Afrikaans-speaking Henry Stone, 'adrift in a rapidly changing, unfamiliar world' where he 'must rely on the good graces of an urban Black' (114). This reversal of the familiar 'Jim Comes to Jo'burg' trope casts Henry Stone and Stix Letsebe as reflector-shade doubles akin to Lambert and Sonnyboy. Henry's increasing ability to cope with contemporary urban life is measured by his increasing fluency in the demotic, highly creolised language Stix teaches him.
- ⁵ Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging [Afrikaner Resistance Movement], a quasi-Nazi political organisation led by Eugene Terre'Blanche, active in the interregnum between apartheid and the first ANC-dominated government, and particularly drawing support from poor rural Afrikaners on the Highveld.
- ⁶ In an e-mail Leon de Kock described this scene as 'one of the key nodes of untranslatability in the novel. The reflector-man's lingo is untranslatable because it is thoroughly multilingual already. This is a case where to "translate" would be to traduce. The sheer joy of his language lies in its hybridity. Now, however, one faces two options ... either do as Cormac McCarthy does in his novels and just go with the unglossed (Spanish in McCarthy's case), which adds in a way to the heterogeneity of the piece and to its cultural difference — arguably it is a political decision NOT to reduce such heterogeneity to the bland neutrality of pure, or standard, English; or, make reasonable accommodations with your likely readers, who are in different cultural contexts and cannot always be expected to make the feints and shifts a SA reader is able to make. For the most part, I'm prepared to shift register for the international audience. But that reflector man is a key problem. To traduce his lingo would be exactly the wrong thing to do, it seems to me' (personal e-mail, December 17th, 1997). See also de Kock's comments in Shaun de Waal's long review 'A Novel that Finds Adversity in Triumph'.
- ⁷ In the version translated by W.P.B. Botha, published in *Index in Censorship* (that is, for another international readership) again, the translation relies entirely on English words, with the exception of *kaffir*, *dagga*, and *takkies*.
- ⁸ In *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*, Michael Chapman includes the example of 'Baby, Come Duze' a 1956 photo-story by Can Themba and Gopal Naransamy (109–113). The original piece had the following introduction: 'There's a new lingo in the townships, bright as the bright-boys, made of Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho, English and brand-new words. Here's a story in lingo — and explanations' (109). The placing of Afrikaans first in the list is no mere indication of alphabetism, as Afrikaans provides

the core of the language. The story itself sketches out a tale of a woman swept off her feet by one of the 'bright boys', and ends with her commenting admiringly that if the baby she is carrying turns out like his father, 'dan maak hy nyakanyaka onder die cherrekies net soos hom ganbini' [he'll cause trouble among the little girls just like his father] (113).

- ⁹ I am thinking both of Eliot's own use of vernacular, particularly at the end of the 'A Game of Chess' section of *The Waste Land* and in his Sweeney poems, and of his championing of Kipling's verse. The much more conservative language of *Four Quartets* stands in stark contrast to the earlier work.
- ¹⁰ Vladislavic's fictional proof reader's dismay at the 'decline of standards' in public versions of English is mirrored by broadcaster and journalist Robert Kirby. Attacking contemporary sloppiness Kirby writes, 'Any respect for — never mind preservation of — the grace and subtlety of English has long since been drowned in the sullen howling of democratic throats' (*Mail and Guardian*, December 31, 2001 online). Kirby does, however, moderate his apparently anti-democratic tone by arguing that the listeners are the losers when broadcasters use a 'spiritless mode of spoken English ... akin to George Orwell's "Newspeak", an official language that progressively limits the range of ideas and independent thought'.
- ¹¹ The movement towards this kind of language is already evident in South African poetry where writers and performers have used considerable linguistic variation for some time. Wopko Jensma is perhaps a pioneering figure in this regard, while contemporary black poets such as Lesego Rampolokeng, Seithamo Motsapi, and Bonani Vila have made a feature of stretching English beyond any limits that Vladislavic's Aubrey Tearle would permit.

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‘BABY COME DUZE’

THERE’S A NEW LINGO IN THE TOWNSHIPS, BRIGHT AS THE BRIGHT-BOYS, MADE OF AFRIKAANS, ZULU, SOTHO, ENGLISH AND BRAND-NEW WORDS. HERE’S A STORY IN LINGO – AND EXPLANATIONS.

Story by ‘bra’ D. Can Themba.

Pictures by ‘bra’ Gopal S. Naransamy.

Prettyboy: ‘Globe daar, man, Snooky man. Daai’s nou eintlik die real goete. Jy notch?’

Snooky: ‘Jy val babies bo. Daai’s die Casbah Baos se rubberneck, en sy vat nie moegoes kop-toe nie.’

Prettyboy: ‘Get a load of that one, Snooky. That’s the genuine article. Get it?’

Snooky: ‘You go for every skirt. That girl belongs to the Casbah Boys, and won’t go for suckers.’



‘Say, baby, you got me crazy!’

Prettyboy: ‘Ek sê, baby, ‘n man pitch cruel vir jou. Pun-yuka ek net, dan hol ons die toun toe.’
Ellen: ‘Jy’s babies verskrik, hê! Wat gaan vir wat en wie gaan vir wie? Ou Bull van die Casbahs maak jou hinty, finish en klaar, Daak!’



Prettyboy: ‘I say, baby, I’m nuts about you. Give me a break, and you and I will paint the town red.’

Ellen: ‘You’re girl-crazy, eh! What’s cooking? Bull of the Casbah Boys will kill you off, finish and flat. Scoot!’



Ellen: ‘Toe was ek mix-zup van die out-tie, maar ek nyekeza. Ek was gestoot. Ou Bull is coward met ‘n gounie, en hy neinen net vir molle. My Mma hoor my, is Jozi die!’

Ellen: ‘But I fell hard for the bright-boy. Still I played angel. I was cornered. Bull is cruel with a knife, and goes to jail just through dames. Goodness, this is Joburg!’



‘Lay-off that doll, small-fry!’

Bull: ‘Jy deal met my moll, spy.
Pazama weer by daai cherry,
dan quip ek you vuil.’

*Bull: ‘You string with my girl,
small-fry. Just dare go near that
dame and I’ll beat you up bad.’*

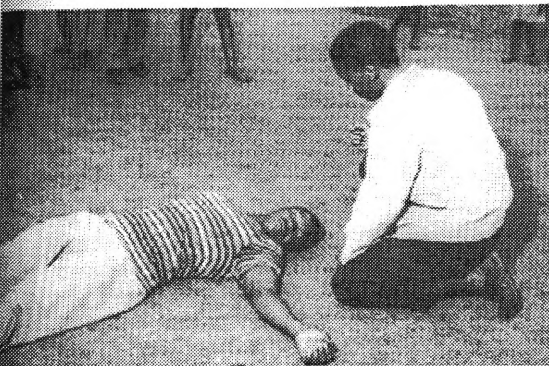


‘n Shot maak jou nie wild as jy
Judo notch nie, man. Ga hom
Voor hom hele laaities , , ,’

*‘A bigshot can’t scare you if
you know Judo. Grab him in
front of all his boys . . .’*

‘Spin hom; hy moet brul soos ‘n
os as hy vlie ant hulle is almal
sissies as jy pluck hou.’

*‘Throw him; he must roar like
an ox when he flies for they’re
all cowards when you show
courage.’*



‘Die Here weet, die dikker die
vark die harder val hy.’

*‘God knows, the bigger the pig
the harder it drops.’*



Prettyboy: 'Toe kom Easter – mdlalos, nice-times, piekniet! Maar waar! Ons los die bricados in die shashi, ek en my mama, two-out. Jy gaan dit val ok gee, maar ons dlala tot die beste romantic word.'

Prettyboy: 'Then came Easter – fun parties, picnic! But what! We dodged the boys, my dame and I, all by ourselves. You'll think I'm pulling a fast one, but we spooned till even the cattle became romantic.'



**'Night and day,
you are the one
I love.'**

Prettyboy: 'En daai aand mova ons titch-toe cruel ge-clip. Die toun was mca, hinty man. Die baby ga my, is shandies kalykit crackets sgoer-sgoer in my koukie. Ek was weg, man, weg man . . .'

Prettyboy: 'And that night we went home, in close embrace. The town was beautiful. Silent. My girl pressed me, things exploded as if crackers burst in my head. I was gone, man, gone man . . .'



**Loving,
and laughter,
forever after . . .**

Ellen: 'Moet dit 'n laaitie is, dan maak hy nyakanyaka onder die cherrekies net soos hom ganbini. Dan squeal hy die mamzan globe hom weg met 'n evil while hy nog boeke oopmaak.'

Prettyboy: 'Yefies! Yefries! Dan lê hy die baby by die mong, dan rwa hy haar met die ou spead: "Baby, come duze!" Yefies! Yefies!'

Ellen: 'If it's a boy, he'll cause trouble among the little girls just like his father. And he'll grumble that her mother stares him off whilst he's still making love.'

Prettyboy: 'Geewhiz! Geewhiz! Then he waylays her at the chinaman's shop, and then he deceives her with the old flattery: "Baby, come closer!" Geewhiz! Geewhiz!'

[April 1956]

THE END

MEG SAMUELSON

The Rainbow Womb: Rape and Race in South African Fiction of the Transition

A striking pattern is emerging in fictional representations of rape published during the South African transition from apartheid to multi-racial democracy.¹ It is a configuration that relentlessly inserts race into the scene of rape by focussing almost exclusively on interracial rape.² The light shone on rape is refracted through the prism of race as the country once characterised by racial divisions refashions itself into the 'rainbow nation'. Within this schema, the consequence of rape is measured in the birth of a 'mixed race' child. So dominant is this plot that even a narrative of male rape, K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, juxtaposes the rape of a black man by a coloured man with a black woman's conception of a child by a German father. The substitution of woman's body by body politic is highlighted in her name, Mmabatho ('mother of the people'). Compelling though this scenario may be to writers, it is one that fails to ring true in reality, where rape is overwhelmingly intraracial and the rate of conception comparatively low.³ The literary script of rape thus distorts the realities of sexual violence in order to direct attention away from the violated female body — or the male body gendered female — and focus it on a trail of 'blood' weaving through the woman's womb.

Wary of adopting a prescriptive tone and insisting that literature should conform to a certain social vision, I am nonetheless concerned by the degree of disjuncture between literary plots and social reality, particularly when this disjuncture obscures a pressing reality. Central to my discomfit are the ways in which the metaphorical use of women's bodies eclipse and distort the social and political realities they inhabit. For rape is far from just a metaphor in South African society of the transition. It is an endemic — and proliferating — social disorder.⁴ Thus, the metaphorical slippage between body and body politic that is exploited in representations of rape conceals and submerges a far more urgent narrative of an ascendant violence against women, which, in a country wracked by HIV/AIDS, is often deadly.⁵

Critiquing the erasure of gendered violence within its very representation, I take my cue from Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver who, in their introduction to *Rape and Representation*, observe 'an obsessive inscription — and an obsessive erasure — of sexual violence against women (and against those placed by society in the position "woman")' (2). They note a 'conspicuous absence' in configurations such as those with which we are concerned here, 'where sexual violence against women is an origin of social relations and narratives in which the event itself is

subsequently elided' (2–3). 'The term *elision*', the authors remind us, 'deriv[es] from the Latin *laedere*, to hurt or damage, and relating to *lesion*, suggests once again the secret ways in which representation is linked to the physical, and damaged stories can represent damaged bodies' (6).

Higgin's and Silver's intervention is pertinent to Arthur Maimane's *Hate No More* (2000), where rape and childbirth are relegated to the blank space between two paragraphs, while remaining central to the novel's plot. First published in exile as *Victims* (1976), *Hate No More* was reissued, subtly revised and framed between a prologue and epilogue, under its new title after Maimane's return to South Africa. Set in the 1950s, the novel opens with the main protagonist, Philip, walking through the streets of Johannesburg. After being humiliated by a passing group of white people, he follows a white woman, Jean, into an alley and rapes her. Electing to keep the child born of rape, Jean is cast out by her husband and circle of white friends. She and her baby move to a 'grey' area on the fringes of both white and black society where, in a bizarre plot twist, she employs Philip's wife-to-be, Betty, who identifies her as the rape victim. Betty and Philip offer to adopt the child, but Jean refuses to give her up.

In both versions the primary authorial impulse appears to be the exoneration of Philip. While Maimane (or his editors) have removed *Victims*' claim that Jean actually enjoyed the rape (see *Victims* 57), Philip's new defence is that, 'lying there like a piece of wood. Ice-cold fish', she 'didn't feel anythin' (74–5). References to physical harm have been expunged from the revised text. Whereas in *Victims* Philip attempted to derive pleasure from 'hurting' Jean, in *Hate No More* this is achieved by 'defiling' her and pulling her down into 'the muck' (25). This is an important alteration in the novel's attempt to sketch the rape as a purely racial rather than gendered event. Philip wishes to muddy the 'immaculate whiteness' (24) of the 'white goddess' (21), 'the very fount' (27) of the white race. What he wishes to drag into the muck is white woman as treasured symbol of the white ethnic; what he wishes to sully is the white womb as boundary marker of racial purity. The gendered body evaporates and is transfigured into a symbol of the race. By justifying — indeed, glorifying — Philip's rape in these terms, Maimane's novel feeds directly into the discourse that he is trying to counter. Apartheid was an inherently gendered affair.⁶ Irresistibly drawn to its gender politics, Maimane is unable to extricate himself from its overarching logic.

The post-apartheid framing of the narrative readjusts the novel's focus to draw our attention to the issue of rape. The prologue ends with Philip wondering 'What was her name again?' (13), and it is in her name, Beatrice, that her metaphorical function is illuminated. The child, supposedly, will lead us through the moral maze of Philip's past into the heaven of the new South Africa, just as Beatrice leads Dante out of the Inferno and into Paradise, but the epilogue recants even on this point as the 'mixed race' Beatrice is displaced in favour of the 'legitimate' black daughter, Bontle. As Philip recounts: 'Betty had believed that only adopting

“this *boesman* child of yours” could lift the crippling weight of guilt pressing down on his resentful shoulders. Bontle’s birth had slowly lifted that weight’ (290) [emphasis added]. Bontle, not Beatrice, becomes the redemptive figure leading Philip into the new South Africa. Murdered by the apartheid regime during the students’ uprising of 1976, Bontle was the catalyst that drove Philip into politics, and a plush new post-apartheid career as Chair of the Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality Portfolio of the Gauteng Legislature. The racist slur of ‘*boesman*’⁷ and the transposition of redemption from Beatrice to Bontle are signposts of a troubling commitment to racial purity. This commitment is deeply entrenched in the gender politics implicit in this representation of rape, which are alarmingly at odds with Philip’s new post. Equally troubling are the final words of the novel, where attention is shifted from both daughters — ‘mixed race’ and ‘pure’ — in order to bequeath the future to the son-citizens. As Anne McClintock has shown in her study of the gendering of national time, women, ‘embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity’, are called upon to bear the weight of the past while the national sons march forward into the future, ‘embodying nationalism’s progressive, or revolutionary, principle of discontinuity’ (92).

This is a point that J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* takes up. Petrus, Lucy’s erstwhile black labourer, informs her father, David, that she, a white woman, is a ‘forward-looking lady, not backward-looking’ (136). David, on the other hand, fears that his daughter is being made to carry the burdens of the past. ‘You wish to humble yourself before history’, he tells her (160). In which direction is this novel, so preoccupied with tense and season, taking us? *Disgrace* is a complex and finely wrought novel. This cursory analysis is admittedly unable to do justice to its nuanced layers of meaning as I restrict myself to dealing with aspects of the novel that resonate within a broader pattern.⁸

The novel’s diptych structure sets up a partial mirror between two sets of sexual relations. The first, located in Cape Town, is David’s ‘arrangement’ with Soraya, a sex-worker of Asian descent, and his affair with a coloured student, Melanie Isaacs,⁹ which is subsequently labelled abuse. The scene then moves to the Eastern Cape, where David’s daughter, Lucy, is gang-raped by three black men. The rapists flee from the scene of the crime in David’s car, a 1993 white Toyota *Corolla*. This small but carefully placed detail nudges us to see David’s sexual relations with Soraya and Melanie as a *corollary* of Lucy’s rape. The white Japanese model car reminds us of the arbitrariness of racial classification under apartheid, which labelled Chinese non-white and Japanese white in order to suit economic interests. Thus, while Lucy and Melanie initially appear to be antithetical (Lucy the light, ‘Meláni: the dark one’ [18]), this opposition is undercut, as is the ideology behind the classification of ‘disparate’ races.

That the two sets of sexual relations are situated in specified locations is significant. Cape Town, along with Melanie’s reference to the African American writers, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, recalls the legacy of slavery so repressed

and submerged in South African history, not least because it speaks of the constitution of Afrikanerdom within a milieu of racial and cultural mixing. It is repressed, too, among descendents of slaves as a shameful reminder of primary miscegenation (see Wicomb 100). For the institution of slavery was one of unseen and permissible rape of women of colour by white men. This history of rape provides the backdrop to David's sexual relations with Melanie and Soraya. Soraya's profession as a sex-worker is drawn within its frame as David remarks that the agency, Discreet Escorts, 'own[s] Soraya [...], this part of her, this function' (2). Similarly, during David's hearing on sexual harassment, Farodia Rassool insists that David recognise 'the long history of exploitation of which this is a part' the ethnic trace of her name suggesting her own place within this 'history of exploitation' (53). Thus, while David sees these relations as innocuous, the text creates a radically different reading of them.

The setting of Salem is as eloquent, invoking, as it does, 'a history of frontier wars waged over the issue of land between the British settlers and the Xhosa people in the nineteenth century' (Marais 36). In the time of the novel, the tide is turning once again as the land in Salem, once part of 'Old Kaffraria' (122), later the heart of settler country (see the visit to Settler's Hospital), is now being reclaimed by Petrus as representative of the black majority. Given this background, the rape of Lucy's body begins to stand as an allegory for the rape of the land. Indeed, David is urgently aware that 'Petrus would like to take over Lucy's land' (117). These suspicions are validated when one of the rapists re-emerges as a member of Petrus' family during the party to celebrate the success of his land claim. Here one may wish to take issue with the metaphorical substitution of women's body for the land. Or, one might say that Coetzee merely takes to its logical conclusion what it may mean to be 'a child of this earth' (216) in a land marked by rapine and plunder.

The multivalent meanings arising from the location of Salem cast back also to the witches of Salem and warn of the ways in which women have historically borne the crucible of transitional states.¹⁰ Marianne Hester argues that, like rape, witch-hunt persecutions function 'as a means of social control' (4) over women and 'were an attempt at maintaining and restoring male supremacy' (107) within the context of major social and economic restructuring. Anxieties around inheritance and female property ownership lay at the heart of the Salem hysteria (Karlsen 213). Similar anxieties cluster around female sexuality, particularly patterns of behaviour labelled 'sexually deviant' (Hester: 196); that is, sexual behaviour beyond or in excess of the patriarchal family's reproductive requirements. Thus Lucy's lesbianism, like the gay sexuality of Duiker's Tshepo and Melanie's earlier reference to Adrienne Rich, is pivotal, as David realises: 'Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow. Did they know what they were up to, those men? Had the word got around?' (105). The rape, following a similar logic to witch-hunts, reinserts Lucy into the patriarchal family

as reproductive body and annuls the menace of the self-sufficient, land-owning woman. Living under the threat of future rapes, she is forced to seek protection by creeping in under Petrus' wing. Ceding her land to him after being seeded by the rapists, she keeps only the house, the domestic sphere, as emblem of her autonomy. 'How they put her in her place', thinks David, 'how they showed her what a woman was for' (115). Here we see again a carefully historicised representation of rape that acknowledges the act of power being performed over women's bodies. Of lingering concern, though, is Lucy's accommodation to this status quo.

Living alongside one of her rapists, Lucy says that she is 'prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace' (208). This returns us to Salem, literally meaning 'peace', and, in its local application, refers to reconciliation between sects of settlers (Raper 288). In the New International Bible (1987), Salem, mentioned before the promise of Isaac, is also glossed as Jerusalem. Thus Salem bespeaks the discourse of reconciliation and the 'promised land', with a specific appeal to women to bear the messianic son. This is played out in the narrative through David's thoughts on becoming 'A grandfather. A Joseph' (217), reminding us of the biblical allusions within his own name. Similarly, the reference to 'Three fathers in one' (199) finds an ominous echo in the three wild geese that visit Lucy annually. 'I feel so lucky to be visited. To be the one chosen' (88), says she, at the start of the chapter in which the rape occurs.

This imagery turns women into vessels carrying the future (the messiah). Lucy, lucky to be 'chosen', is transfigured into the Virgin Mary. By a sleight of hand, a violent gang rape is transformed into an immaculate conception. These are the ways in which sexual violence is erased even as it is written. Just as Lucy becomes the vessel for reconciliation and redemption, she, Melanie and Soraya become vessels of history as they carry within them the heritage of place. These women embody the past while Lucy's womb carries the future.

David defends the force that drove him into Melanie's arms as being the 'seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being' (194). He uses similar terms to describe Lucy's rape: 'They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself' (199). The terms resonate with the novel's close focus on tense. '[U]surp upon means to intrude or encroach upon. *Usurp*, to take over entirely, is the perfective of *usurp upon*' (21), David informs his disinterested class. It is reiterated that Lucy, a woman alone on a farm, has no future. The future can only come into being once Lucy has been usurped by the rapists' seed. The novel itself is written in the present tense, like David it awaits the birth of the child before the future can come into being.

Returning to our diptych structure, I suggest it is around Lucy's pregnancy that the hinge holding the two frames together begins to come undone. Neither

Melanie nor Soraya are impregnated by David, and a condom is conspicuously brought into view when he has (intra)racial sex with Bev Shaw. This even though David defends his affair with Melanie in terms of 'the seed of generation'. Why does this seed only get to perfect itself in the white woman's body? Perhaps, Melanie and Soraya are already 'children of this earth'? Implicit once again in their location is their racially 'mixed' status. It is Lucy, as white woman, who falls pregnant. The only one of the rapists to be named is the boy, Pollux. While his name ostensibly alludes to the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, read phonetically it also suggests both pollution and cleansing (after the popular brand of soap, Lux). This along with the language used to describe Lucy's rape, which has 'marked', 'soiled' and 'darkened' her (124 and 199), foregrounds the white womb as racial boundary marker. As a white woman, Lucy has no future until her womb has been 'soiled' and 'darkened'. Here the novel slips back into a symbolic reading of rape and the carefully historicised backdrop slides out of view.

Thus the corollary between Lucy and Melanie and Soraya begins to fray around the nexus of race and gender. While the parallels between the two frames seemingly prevent the reproduction of a racially exclusive patriarchy implicit in the division of men into rapists and protectors, the novel persists in displacing the violence of rape onto this set of oppositions. Violence inheres only in the black rapists and is erased from David's trysts. He can afford to 'buy' Soraya for one afternoon per week and his seduction of 'passive' Melanie (19) is described as 'not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core' (25). Into the space created by the phrase 'not quite that' pours the avalanche of racial meanings explicit in Homi Bhabha's famous dictum '*almost the same but not quite Almost the same but not white*' (89 [emphasis in original]). When comparing David to the rapists we might say, 'almost the same but not quite, almost the same but ... white'. Radical difference is entered into apparent commonality *along the axis of race* and the corollary is shattered, and it is this that has provoked in some a fierce reaction against the novel.¹¹

Difference, too, is apparent between the symbolic import of Lucy's pregnancy and that of Petrus' wife. Though we are treated to a pastoral image of Lucy, lightly pregnant as she tends her flowerbeds with the spring crop blooming, this optimism is muted. Lucy works in the long shadow cast by Petrus' new house. His 'pure' race child will be born in the spring with all its suggestions of renewal and growth, while Lucy's, expected only in late May, will be born into the frosts of an early Eastern Cape winter. It is hard to determine whether the novel's stance is ironic or allegorical here. Perhaps we should give the last word to Lucy, who resists being turned into an allegorical seme when telling her father of her pregnancy and decision to keep the child:

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am the minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor.

I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me, as yours is important to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions. (198)

Lucy, who is a supporting character in *Disgrace*, making her appearance halfway through this story narrated from her father's point of view, reminds us that her story is not David's story and suggests that his story cannot tell her experiences of rape. Nonetheless, it remains troubling, that through her agency 'over the body of woman silence is being drawn like a blanket' (110). Lucy gives us just one justification for this silence, and it is not a comforting one. 'In another time, in another place', the rape would not be unspeakable, she says. 'But in this place, at the time, it is not.... This place being South Africa' (112), this time being the years of political transition. This is an ambiguous point on which to end this analysis. Is Lucy speaking the language of pessimism, or white guilt, which some have found to pervade the plot? Or, is she attempting to evade the very master-narrative of rape in South African literature of the transition that this paper is critiquing?

Prepared to pay any price for peace, any price to stay on in Salem, she is drawn into a further 'stock theme' of post-apartheid literature: that of reconciliation (Mzamane 13). This is a plot David has taken care to distance himself from. Lucy, however, who says, 'Women can be surprisingly forgiving' (69), seems entrapped therein. In *Disgrace*, then, reconciliation and a future in the country are negotiated through Lucy's child of rape. André Brink's *Imaginings of Sand*¹² operates on a similar set of dynamics. The primary impulse of this novel appears to be the construction of a 'rainbow family' during the heady days leading up to the 1994 election. Constituting this family requires the recognition of mixed bloodlines, specifically the recognition of the hired coloured 'help' as 'family'. The white protagonist, Kristien, is able to claim the coloured domestic worker, Trui, as a sister before casting her vote when a family history of revenge rapes across the colour line is told to her. The overdetermined narrative drive towards rainbow nationalism eclipses the violence done to both Kristien's and Trui's foremothers and racial mixing means very different things to the two women. The acknowledgement of 'mixed blood' within whiteness is celebrated and creates for Kristien a sense of national belonging. Her decision to stay in South Africa is one 'which has been shaped inside myself', she says, 'like a child in the womb' (349), a child now infused with the blood of Trui's family, but the novel's construction of colouredness ventriloquised through Trui is stereotypical: 'First the whites gave us hell, now it's the blacks. For us in-between people nothing will ever change' (169).

All these representations of the violent appropriation of women's bodies depend also upon an appropriation of the female voice: Lucy drawing a veil of silence over her rape; Maimane's Betty issuing the racist slur against 'mixed' blood while Jean, the victim of rape, eroticises sexual violence (142–43); *Imaginings of Sand*

speaking throughout in the voice of a woman as the title becomes an extended metaphor for a female, matrilineal historiography which nonetheless eclipses rape, imagines women's future through childbirth and repeats a discourse of in-betweenness when conceptualising coloured identity. Equally unsettling is a female representation of rape that speaks through the male voice, which we find in Jo-Ann Richard's best-selling novel *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*. One of the few narratives that does not follow rape with childbirth, this novel quickly dispenses with the sexual assault of an elderly white woman in order to turn its attention to the act of retribution, as the black rapist is forced to castrate himself. The former is glossed over while the latter 'cut into [the female narrator's] insides and slice[d] away [her] life' (244). In contrast, the rape is narrated solely by male characters, who define it as 'not something men should allow to happen to their women' (50).

Turning now to women writing rape from the female perspective, I suggest that Lauretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* and Farida Karodia's *Other Secrets* successfully shatter the symbolic script surrounding rape and fulfil Higgins' and Silver's injunction to 'reclaim the physical, material bodies of women from their status as "figures"' (4). Once again, though, contradictions continue to cluster around the children of interracial rape. *And They Didn't Die* is set in a world overshadowed by Bantustans, influx control and pass laws. Exploring the ways in which this web of legislation has exposed black women to white power manifest in the sexual aggression of white men, the novel carefully sketches the social reality of rape rather than employing it as a literary trope.

Unable to support herself and her children on the depleted lands of the Bantustan, Jezile seeks domestic work in the city. There she is raped by her white employer and falls pregnant. On her return home she is ostracised by her husband's family, as shame is shown to adhere to the rape victim rather than the perpetrator. The contradictions of African patriarchy and white supremacy through which Jezile moves are carefully sketched, but the authorial handling of the child of rape is disappointing. Lungu, whose name refers to whiteness and highlights his racial status, rallies to support the anti-apartheid struggle, but, in a curious move that reveals a marked suspicion for 'mixed-blood', Ngcobo has him gunned down during the 1976 student protests and 'paralysed from the waist down' (235). After carefully resisting the symbolic plot of rape, Ngcobo's novel remains enmeshed in discourses of racial purity as Lungu is rendered sterile — the end of the line.

The child of rape suffers a similar fate in *Other Secrets*. Like Maimane, Karodia has recently returned to South Africa after twenty-six years in exile; also like Maimane, she has reissued an earlier novel with revisions and extensions as *Daughters of the Twilight* (1986) becomes the first section of *Other Secrets* (2000). Both culminate in the rape of Meena's older sister Yasmin by the son of a prominent Afrikaner family. Subtle differences between the two renditions of the rape scene and its aftermath are revealing, as the revised text unshackles itself from the

symbolic script. While in *Daughters* the rape is positioned as a symbolic act that stands in for the invasion and appropriation of the family's home (126), *Other Secrets* explicitly distances itself from this representation and drives a wedge between the trauma of the forced removals and the horror of rape. 'Nothing', says Meena, 'could compare' with Yasmin's ordeal (277). Similarly, while Yasmin rejects the child of rape in both novels, the emphasis again differs. No longer fearing that the unborn child 'would end up disowned in its father's world and despised in its mother's world' (*Daughters* 137), Meena realises that Yasmin 'was not capable of loving a child who was a constant reminder of the rape' (278). The focus is on the anguish caused by the rape, rather than on the consequences of race 'mixing'.

Once again, though, the child's name foregrounds this mixing. Initially called Fatima, *Other Secrets* renames her Soraya.¹³ Her namesake, Princess Soraya Esfandiari Bakhriari, ex-Empress of Iran, was of mixed Iranian and German descent. Divorced and banished,¹⁴ Soraya Esfandiari Bakhriari's story fits into the tragic mould, confirming the 'tragedy of mixed blood' that has held sway over the South African imagination since Sarah Gertrude Millin's infamous diatribe against miscegenation in *God's Step-Children* (1924). Millin's message, according to Coetzee, is that 'Mixed blood is a harbinger of doom' (*White Writing* 152) and it is one whose reverberations continue to be felt. Echoing the fate of Lungu in *And They Didn't Die*, Soraya is killed in a car accident. In a closing symbolic gesture, she is kept on life-support until the foetus that she is carrying (fathered by a white British man) is delivered and her heart is donated (455). Neither the beneficiary of the heart, nor the baby is given any racial markers; the latter is simply described as 'beautiful'. Here racial 'mixing' introduced by rape is treated without the ambivalence that emerges elsewhere. Yet the inability to imagine a life for Soraya herself, like the failure of imagination surrounding Ngcobo's Lungu, is sobering.

Other Secrets treads carefully around the symbolic plot of rape, yet persists in hailing Soraya's birth as 'The dawning of a new day' (139), thereby slipping into the clichéd discourse of the South African 'miracle'. In the novels analysed here, imagining the dawning of this new day through the imagery of childbirth is a process fraught with contradictions. Marshalled to the task of blending blood, permeating boundaries and violently shattering the classificatory borders of apartheid ideology, women are being asked to bear the burden of South Africa's past and the fruit of its future. Their violated wombs become the privileged site out of which the rainbow nation will issue, as stories of their violation are subordinated to those of their swelling figures. Even this schema is handled with much ambivalence. The children, so relentlessly inserted into the plot, are an insurmountable stumbling block as the substitution of mother for rape victim rearticulates the apartheid discourses of blood purity enshrined in what Aletta Norval calls the 'pillars of apartheid' (125): the Population Registration Act, Mixed

Marriages Act and Immorality Amendment Act. The South African literary imagination has shown itself, as yet, unable to extricate itself from this web of legislation grouped around the female reproductive body. Thus, not only does the metaphorical use of women's bodies in much of this fiction deny and distort the reality faced by South African women, it also acts as an anchor, securing us to the past and preventing the nation from being imagined in terms beyond the all-too-familiar ones of blood and race.

NOTES

- ¹ For the purposes of this paper, I delineate this period as being 1990 to 2000, though I do refer briefly to K. Sello Duiker's novel published in 2001.
- ² Though representations of inter-racial rape can also be found in fiction of the apartheid years, they lack the accumulative emphasis of more recent fiction. Notable examples of intraracial rape are those by Njabulo Ndebele and Gcina Mhlope (in *Fools* and 'Nokulunga's Wedding'), while Lewis Nkosi's and J.M. Coetzee's accounts of interracial rape (in *Mating Birds* and *In the Heart of the Country* highlight ambiguity and uncertainty. Sipho Sepamla does break from the mould of transition literature in *Rainbow Journey* (1996) by narrating an intraracial rape, and it is notable that this rape does not bear fruit. But an allegorical structure is still foregrounded: Beauty is raped while travelling to her lover, Justice. Elsewhere, representations of intraracial rape plot themselves on the metaphorical suggestiveness of incest as signifying Afrikaner nationalism. Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* is the most significant text in this regard, further examples can be found in Brink (*Devil's Valley*) and Karodia (*Other Secrets*).
- ³ Carmine Rustin's study of rape in post-apartheid South Africa notes that, though interracial rape constitutes a statistically insignificant percentage of rape cases, it continues to receive more prominence in the media (4). Rustin, citing statistics provided by the South African Police, the Crime Management Information Centre and the National Crime Investigation Service, shows that between 1992 and 1996 interracial rape gradually declined from comprising 2.57% of total rape cases reported to a negligible 1.65% (Rustin 77). U.S. statistic set the rate of conception arising out of rape at 4.7%. According to Charlene Smith, who bases her argument on these statistics, in South Africa 'Many raped women contract sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, a lesser percentage fall pregnant' (248).
- ⁴ Human Rights Watch notes that the incidence of rape rose by 81% between 1990 and 1995. The years 1995 to 2000 saw a further escalation of sexual violence. Johannesburg alone witnessed an increase of 16% in 1996 (Johnson). On the 3rd of July 1999 a *Cape Times* headline renamed Cape Town 'Rape Town'.
- ⁵ A non-fictional portrayal, journalist Charlene Smith's autobiographical account of her own rape, draws awareness to this aspect generally ignored or glossed over in fiction. A white woman raped by a black man, Smith insists 'it has nothing to do with race' (8). Her narrative attempts to redirect attention towards the struggle for the provision of anti-retroviral drugs to rape-victims. President Thabo Mbeki, however, has continued to respond from within the discourse of race, accusing Smith of 'racist rage' (268).

- ⁶ The separation of racial groups ('apartheid') was maintained through legislation grouped around the female reproductive body in the form of the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, that forbade interracial marriages, and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, that outlawed sexual relations between members of different 'racial groups'. In the wake of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), solidarity between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites was in part achieved through the dissemination of 'Black Peril' scares, which constructed white womanhood as under threat of black sexual assault.
- ⁷ 'Boseman' (literally 'Bushman') is a racist slur directed at peoples of so-called 'mixed-race' ('coloureds') and peoples of San descent.
- ⁸ A profitable way to read the rape in *Disgrace* would be to see it as an intertextual response to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, which Coetzee has written on in his collection of essays, *Stranger Shores*. This is not, however, a reading that this paper is able to undertake.
- ⁹ Many reviewers have identified Melanie's racial group as coloured. Derek Attridge adds a cautionary note to the kind of reading offered here: 'The resultant allegorical scheme [based on reading Melanie as coloured] is something that only South African readers schooled in the niceties of apartheid thinking would be tempted into' (106n13). Melanie's performance of colouredness, as she delivers her predictable but deftly timed lines 'in a whining *Kaaps* accent' (191) does, however, substantiate my reading.
- ¹⁰ At the same time, the suggestions of a witch-hunt sit uneasily alongside the novel's oblique references to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- ¹¹ Aggrey Klaaste writing in the *Sowetan*, for example, finds that the novel 'depicts a white male fear about black male sexual potency' (in Paulette Coetzee and Crystal Warren 127)
- ¹² Though this paper will only consider *Imaginations of Sand*, it is notable that rape looms large in Brink's novels of this period — see *The First Life of Adamastor*, *Devil's Valley*, and *The Rights of Desire*. *Imaginations of Sand* purports to tell the her-story of the South African past as Kristien's grandmother bequeaths to her the story of their foremothers. The novel ends with Kristien deciding to return to the country that she had fled as a young woman.
- ¹³ Published after *Disgrace*, this could also be an intertextual reference to David's sex-worker.
- ¹⁴ Her jewellery, kept under the divorce terms, later made its way to South Africa, and was auctioned in Pietermaritzburg in 1998.

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GILLIAN GANE

Unspeakable Injuries in *Disgrace* and *David's Story*

Coincidentally two major novels about the New South Africa both have protagonists called David; David Lurie in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is an aging white man, 'a moral dinosaur', in his daughter's words (89), a man unwilling to change in a world that is changing: 'I am not prepared to be reformed', he says (77). David Dirkse in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, by contrast, has devoted his life to bringing about political change in South Africa; he has long been involved in the guerrilla struggle and holds high office in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress. Like his comrade-in-arms Dulcie, he is 'coloured', in the traditional South African terminology; one strand of the novel is about his quest for his ancestors among the Griqua, a people tracing their ancestry back to the earliest Khoi inhabitants of South Africa, but mixed with many other racial groups.¹

Though these two men are worlds apart, neither fits into the New South Africa. Both end up disgraced and defeated — David Dirkse, the revolutionary hero, dead by his own hand. My focus, however, will not be on these two male protagonists; instead, I will focus on particular women in their stories while trying at the same time to address some absences, gaps, and displacements in the texts they inhabit. Both novels are centrally about dramas of race and the violation of women. The intersection of race and gender is of course always fraught with tension, yet gender seems to carry a disproportionately heavy burden in these novels. In *Disgrace*, in particular, one must suspect that gender is at least to some extent displacing another identity category that cannot easily be named. When I found myself mistyping the title of the novel as *Disrace*, what was missing suddenly became clear: the novel is *dis-raced*—it is uncomfortable with naming racial categories or discussing racial issues. David Lurie is losing the power and privilege he is accustomed to, but instead of pointing to the new racial order he fixates on questions of gender and sexuality. For instance, he refers oddly to the Cape Technical University where he teaches as 'this transformed and, to his mind, *emasculated* institution of learning' (4) [emphasis added]. Perhaps he is squeamish about the impoliteness of naming race; perhaps racial and gendered power are so intertwined in his mind that he genuinely conflates them. In both novels, there is a tension between testimony and silence, truth-telling and secrecy, the private and the public. In each novel, a violated woman chooses to remain silent about her own violation; but her secret is of course revealed to us in the novel itself —

paradoxically, her very silence becomes a source of discourse. Questions of secrecy and silence reverberate beyond the violation of women as each novel struggles with truths that are unutterable and inadmissible.²

Both novels explicitly lament the inaccessibility of truth and the inadequacy of the language available to them as a means of articulating that truth. David Lurie is 'More and more ... convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa' (117). The language is 'tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, and not even all of them'; he cannot imagine what is to be done, 'short of starting all over again with the ABC' (129). In *David's Story* too there are recurrent references to the failings of language. The novel ends with a surreal vision of language collapsing under violent assault as a bullet explodes into the narrator's computer and 'the shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out, leaving behind whole syllables that tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids that scramble my story' (212–13). David Dirkse says that even if Dulcie's story could be figured out, 'it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters' (152). He himself is repeatedly defeated in his struggles to write; he uses 'all the symbols from the top row of the keyboard', doodles, draws pictures. David is uneasily obsessed with truth, though in what he writes, truth itself 'is the word that cannot be written' (136). When David finds his own name and Dulcie's on a hit list, he is shaken to the core, jolted into questioning the foundations of his world: 'can it be true that he does not know the truth? Or worse, that it stares him in the face, the truth which he cannot bear?' And then he pulls himself together — 'mentally he clicks his heels', a revealing description of his reversion to the familiar ethos of the fighting man: 'No ... his honour is unquestionable and the truth lies in black and white, unquestionably, in the struggle for freedom, for the equal distribution of wealth, for education for all, for every man and woman and child's right to dignity' (116). '[T]he truth lies in black and white': an extraordinary, ambiguous statement that points to the complications at the heart of the novel.

If language is inadequate as a tool in the hands of those who struggle to articulate the truth of their own experience in a time of change, certain texts exercise an unexpected power. In both novels the male protagonist is confronted with a document that threatens him profoundly, but is struck by the juxtaposition of his own name with that of a woman, the coupling of the two names signifying a forbidden intimacy. David Dirkse sees the writing of Dulcie's name beneath his own on a hit list as 'coupling' the two of them in 'intimacy', driving them into a 'naked embrace' (136). For Coetzee's David Lurie, the document is the form his student Melanie Isaacs has filled out charging him with sexual harassment: 'Two names on the page, his and hers, side by side. Two in a bed, lovers no longer but foes' (40). A hit list, a charge sheet: two potent documents with far-reaching and

momentous consequences, in one case linking two names as designated victims, in the other opposing them as accuser and accused.

In *Disgrace*, there is one woman who speaks out, making public what David Lurie believes is a private affair, and one woman who remains silent. It is significant that Melanie Isaacs, the woman who speaks, is coloured, though Coetzee typically conveys this only obliquely.³ Before his seduction of Melanie, a student in his Romantics class, David Lurie has 'solved the problem of sex' (1) by patronising prostitutes selected from the 'exotic' listings of an agency called Discreet Escorts. He is evidently attracted by women of colour; it is not unreasonable to suppose that he enjoys the power that accrues to him through the convergence of disparities in gender and race. Certainly he is sexually aroused by the stage performance in which Melanie assumes an accent that is 'glaringly Kaaps' (24) and the persona of a 'dom meid' (192) working in a hairdressing salon.⁴ It is this that leads directly to what is effectively a rape, as if Melanie's racial alterity both inflames David's desire and bolsters his sense of his own entitlement. The complaint that Melanie goes on to lodge with the university authorities, the hearing to which it leads, and David Lurie's subsequent disgrace and dismissal from his job, are symptomatic of the new era. In the old days it would have been unthinkable for a coloured woman to accuse a white man of sexual impropriety. Now, in a proceeding that cannot fail to remind us of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is David who is silent — who resists the whole proceeding, who certainly will not admit to any failings on his part, who is unregenerate and unredeemed.

The woman in this novel who does not speak is David's daughter Lucy. Lucy is clearly from the start a very different person from her father. She moved to the countryside as part of a rural commune which sold handicrafts and grew dagga (that is, marijuana) among the corn (60). She is a lesbian. She is evidently strongly opposed to racism and used to 'fly into a rage at the use of the word *boy*' to refer to adult men (109). She now runs the farm on her own, boarding dogs and raising flowers and vegetables. A black man, Petrus, is her assistant and in the process of becoming a partner in the business. Lucy sets herself apart above all from her father's intellectualism, from his belief in the higher faculties of humans. Accurately sensing David's disdain for her friends, she says, 'You don't approve of friends like Bev and Bill Shaw because they are not going to lead me to a higher life' and continues, 'it is true. They are not going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is' (74). When he says that 'it's not a good idea' for them to go back to the farm after they have been attacked, she responds, 'it's not an idea, good or bad. I'm not going back for the sake of an idea. I'm just going back' (105). 'I don't act in terms of abstractions,' she tells David (112).

While David, disgraced and dismissed from his job, is visiting Lucy on the farm, three black men break into the house, lock David up in the lavatory, and

rape Lucy. Lucy will not speak to her father about the rape, and she refuses to report it to the police:

‘... As far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone’.

‘This place being what?’

‘This place being South Africa.’ (112)

Rape is in fact an act that ruptures the boundaries between the private and the public, that violates the privacy of a woman’s most secret bodily parts and appropriates them for public use. In the hostile stranger rape to which Lucy was subjected, men broke forcibly first into the privacy of her home and then into the privacy of her body. Rape is always a political act — the exertion of male power over a female body; in a rape that crosses racial lines the issues are even more charged. When, as here, it is males of the subordinate race who rape a woman of the dominant race, the rape is likely to inflame vindictive racial passions. For whatever reasons — she does not explain — Lucy forestalls the further eruption of the rape into a widening public arena: it is, she insists, ‘a purely private matter’. To her father, moreover, she maintains repeatedly that he cannot know what she has experienced. ‘*You don’t know what happened,*’ she tells him, ‘you don’t begin to know’ (134) [emphasis in the original]. At least three times it is repeated that David cannot know, cannot understand his daughter’s experience of rape (134, 140, 157), and since, though the novel is narrated in the third person, it is entirely focalised through David, we as readers are effectively told likewise that we cannot know what Lucy has experienced. It is an experience that remains unspoken and unknown — an absence within the text.

Lucy does eventually break down in tears and talks to her father about the rape, while continuing to insist that he cannot ‘understand what happened to me that day’ (157). The rapists’ ‘personal hatred,’ she says, ‘stunned me more than anything’ (156). She believes that her attackers ‘are rapists first and foremost.... I think they *do* rape’, and what is more she believes they will return. She imagines that they see themselves as ‘debt collectors, tax collectors’, and she wonders whether she shouldn’t see them in the same way: ‘what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on?’ she asks (158). Horrified, David urges Lucy to leave the farm: ‘You wish to humble yourself before history’, he writes in a note to her; ‘But the road you are following is the wrong one. It will strip you of all honour; you will not be able to live with yourself’. (160). Lucy replies, ‘I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away’ (161). Her anguish is apparent, and yet this does not make her want to flee danger; the honour that David stresses does not matter to her. Then it transpires that Lucy is pregnant as a result of the rape and will not think of having an abortion. Her black business partner and neighbour Petrus, who already has

two wives (and who turns out to be related to one of Lucy's rapists), suggests that he marry her. Again, David is outraged and incredulous, while Lucy calmly points out the practical advantages of making a deal with Petrus. 'How humiliating,' David says. Lucy agrees that it is humiliating; 'But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity' (205).

Lucy's choices are deeply disturbing. We might approve of her stance as a white South African; humility, the recognition that there is a debt to pay, a willingness to start over with nothing — these would not come amiss for white South Africans, but to feminists her acceptance of rape and her choice to bear the child conceived as a result of rape are dangerous, not least in their implications for all women in a country where violence against women is epidemic. If someone must take on the sins of white South Africa, why should it be Lucy? As Mary Eagleton points out, the novel places the feminist reader in a difficult ethical position: like Eagleton, I find myself at times frustrated with Lucy and sharing her father's concern for her, though David Lurie is otherwise a character with whom I have very little sympathy (Eagleton 196).

At the end of the novel, there is a scene where David appears to become reconciled to the future Lucy has chosen. At her request, he has moved into Grahamstown, but one day he drives out to the farm and comes upon Lucy unobserved as she works among the flowerbeds. The man who not long before reacted with revulsion and despair to the news of his daughter's pregnancy, now thinks:

So: once she was only a little tadpole in her mother's body, and now here she is, solid in her existence, more solid than he has ever been. With luck she will last a long time, long beyond him. When he is dead she will, with luck, still be here doing her ordinary tasks among the flowerbeds. And from within her will have issued another existence, that with luck will be just as solid, just as long-lasting. So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten. (217)

For whatever reason, David has come to terms with Lucy's pregnancy and the prospect of a racially mixed grandchild. Where before he heaved and wept as he wondered, 'is this how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth?' (199), he now looks with equanimity on the continuity of generations, accepting the dwindling of his own part in this lineage but nonetheless perceiving his own contribution as a 'gift' to the future. He goes on to experience a moment of transcendence, an epiphany:

There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of midafternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard. (218)

Flushed, Lucy looks moreover 'the picture of health' (218), the pastiness and slackness David recently observed miraculously gone. The pregnant woman blending into a landscape of flowers and bees becomes an icon of beauty, fecundity, Goethe's eternal feminine — and a hopeful future for the land.

Lucy greets David and invites him in for tea. After their estrangement, his new status as visitor holds out hope for their relationship, too: 'Visitorship, visitation: a new footing, a new start' (218). Significantly, however, this is not quite the end of the novel: after these words, there is one final section, a page and a half long. On Sunday, David as usual helps with the killing of unwanted dogs at the Animal Welfare League clinic, where he now works regularly as a volunteer; the novel ends with David carrying in ('like a lamb') the dog that loves him and consigning him to Bev Shaw's needle — 'giving him up' (220). The brief vision of grandfatherhood, of Lucy's beauty among the flowers, is after all an anomaly in a novel otherwise so unrelievedly bleak.

Dulcie Oliphant in *David's Story* would seem to be a far cry from the gentle flower farmer Lucy in *Disgrace*. Dulcie holds high rank in the liberation army and her feats of arms are legendary. According to David Dirkse, she left home at thirteen; at twenty she was a trained cadre who shot a murderous policeman with his own gun (133). She has 'supernatural powers'; rumour credits 'her legendary strength, her agility, her incredible marksmanship, her invincibility' (180). Nor is it military prowess alone that makes Dulcie extraordinary, for she is also a consummate politician who wins the trust of the conservative Griquas of Kliprand by knowing their hymns and praising their sense of community (131–32).

Dulcie is surrounded by mystery. 'Dulcie and the events surrounding her cannot be cast as story', we are told, 'There is no progression in time, no beginning and no end. Only a middle that is infinitely repeated, that remains in an eternal, inescapable present' (150). David Dirkse is the narrator's only source of information, and he is even more recalcitrant and evasive on the subject of Dulcie than he is on other topics; the narrator admits that since she has only 'disconnected images, snippets' to work with, she has invented much of her material on Dulcie (80). When David himself tries to write about Dulcie, he 'chose to displace her by working on the historical figure of Saartje Baartman instead' (134).⁷ There are then layerings of displacement among which it is virtually impossible to find a 'real', 'true' Dulcie.

The single most salient and most horrifying fact about Dulcie is the torture to which she is subjected. In the small hours of the morning men repeatedly enter her bedroom, having defeated 'reinforced bolts and locks' and an alarm system (81). They wear black tracksuits and face-obscuring balaclava helmets (179). Their procedures are clinical; they carry a doctor's bag filled with instruments of torture (82) and engage in 'a shadow play of surgeons' (178); sometimes they are accompanied by actual medical personnel, a 'real doctor' (82), a nurse responsible for 'mopping up, dressing wounds' (178). The 'one who seems to be in charge'

says on their first visit, 'Not rape, that will teach her nothing, leave nothing; rape's too good for her kind' (178). Yet some of the torture is clearly sexual in nature: her night clothes are removed as the session begins (178), and among the signs left on her body are scars on her buttocks (19) and 'bleeding nipples' (115). Dulcie gathers too from what her tormentors say that 'she cannot be killed; that instead they rely upon her being driven to do it herself' (179). They repeat again and again the name of Chapman's Peak, where a driver who fails to make a sharp turn will fly off the mountain into the sea below (180); in defiance, each morning after they have left, she drives that road 'at breakneck speed' and successfully navigates the turn (179). (It is instead David who will leap off Chapman's Peak to drown.)

Dulcie endures these unspeakable torments stoically. She imagines herself relocated to a 'a storybook place' where 'the body performs the expected — quivers, writhes, shudders, flails, squirms, stretches — but you observe it from a distance'. Or she thinks of 'that which is done to food, to flesh — tenderise, baste, sear, seal, sizzle, score, chop' (180).⁸ She is marked with the traces of her torments: there is a 'crisscross-patterned tattoo' on her thumb (18) and similar marks on her buttocks; on her back are 'four cent-sized circles' resulting from 'the insertion of a red-hot poker between the bones' (19); she has 'cracked ribs' (115). She thinks of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, whose scarred back became a tree.

Who are Dulcie's tormentors? She sees hands that are both black and white; the figures in their black tracksuits are familiar, but imagining them as 'friends, family, comrades ... brings a moment of pure terror, of looking into the abyss'. So she stops trying to identify these visitors, deciding that 'That is where death lies' (179). Dulcie is confronted with the devastating possibility that her comrades in the struggle have secretly turned against her.⁹ There is, however, an even more chilling circumstance. Dulcie and David are in love, according to the narrator, but it is a love not only unconsummated but unspoken; David, as a man of honour (and a married man), cannot act on his love, though the superhuman Dulcie is reduced to adolescent helplessness by her obsession with him. Dulcie realises that 'this pretence of a relationship' — her relationship with David, such as it is —

coincides with the visits by night; that the coincidence carries a meaning that she has not yet fathomed; that one is a recursion, a variant of the other: the silence, the torture, the ambiguity; and that in such recursions — for if on the edge of a new era, freedom should announce itself as a variant of the old — lies the thought of madness madness madness ... (184) [ellipsis in the original].

What is the link between Dulcie's relationship with David and the visits of the torturers? Is she being tortured because of their relationship — in a Movement increasingly conscious of race, are the two of them being singled out as coloureds, perceived as all the more threatening because of the bond between them? Or,

unthinkably, is David himself implicated in the torture of Dulcie, maybe even a participant in that torture?

The only physical contact between the two of them has been David's placing his hands on Dulcie's shoulders; this is referred to three times, twice from his point of view and once from hers. For David, newly aware of the instability of the world, 'taunted by the new, as truth upon conflicting truth wriggles into shape', as he 'held her there, at a distance ... only then ... did the world, the treacherous, helter-skelter world, keep still and hold its peace' (177). In the new world of moral ambiguities, Dulcie provides David with a secure moral ground (this reinforces our understanding of a crucial difference between the two of them: while David accepts the need for *realpolitik*, Dulcie is unwavering in her moral commitment and her idealism); but his response is to reject her steadfastness: 'He will not risk it again. It is the swaying world — the smell of blood and the loud report of gunshot — that is for real' (178). This in itself is ominous and makes Dulcie's perspective on that moment of physical contact all the more significant:

Once, only once, did David come close enough to place his hands on her shoulders. His fingertips pressed precisely into the wounds under her shirt, plunged intimately into her flesh, caressed every cavity, every organ, her lungs, liver, kidneys, her broken heart, with a lick of fire. She would not have been surprised to see those hands withdraw dripping with blood. (199)

Dulcie's perception is completely different from David's; her experience is of penetration, an entry into her wounds (targeted 'precisely' at those wounds), the 'caress' of 'a lick of fire' that draws blood. At the least we have here two strikingly different gendered perceptions of the same encounter. At the worst, this aligns David with Dulcie's torturers even if it does not place him directly in their company — though the pain articulated here apparently does not diminish her love for him. This is a moment comparable to Lucy's acceptance of her rape as a tax she must pay; both women here accept violation and suffering and commit themselves to enduring it in silence.

There is no indication that Dulcie ever protests the torments she undergoes or even speaks of them.¹⁰ At one point David uncharacteristically resorts to metaphor in describing Dulcie: 'she's not like anyone else,' he says; 'I think of her more as a kind of ... a kind of a scream somehow echoing through my story' (134). The narrator finds this 'preposterous'; she responds, first, that 'Dulcie herself would never scream. Dulcie is the very mistress of endurance and control'; second, and more tellingly, 'Dulcie knows that there is only a point to screaming if you can imagine someone coming to your rescue; that a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice — and that there is no such order to which she can appeal' (123). Dulcie is the silent scream resonating through the novel, the protest that can be neither uttered nor heard. Her sufferings are the product of a world where 'The truth lies in black and white' — a world increasingly divided into two

polarised racial groups, where truth oxymoronically *lies*, a world moreover where the military ethos of the struggle is now in tension with the ideals of a nascent democratic society, a world, finally, where women cannot become too powerful. Betrayal and conspiracy are in the air; the enemies that beset both David and Dulcie could be the forces of the apartheid regime — or, more chillingly, they could be their own comrades in the struggle. What cannot be fully confronted or openly said is the terrifying possibility, first, that Dulcie and David's former comrades in arms are now out to get them — the two of them linked because they are both coloured — and, second, that, perhaps in part as a consequence of his own victimisation, David is involved in the torture of Dulcie.

The understanding the narrator eventually reaches of Dulcie's plight is presented in a story she tells David:

Let me tell you another story, I say. About Bronwyn the Brown Witch who can do anything at all. Oh, there are tests galore for her, the usual ones of three wishes, three trips into the woods, three impossible tasks. She passes them all. She uses her magical powers to get her friends out of scrapes, to feed the poor, to stave off hurricanes and earthquakes, to drive back the enemy, until one day her friends, the sticks in the forest, come clattering together, lay themselves down on top of each other until they are a mighty woodpile. There is no way out. Bronwyn the Witch must die on the stake.

(203)

David is visibly shaken: 'you must know about such things, about how things happen, how they twist and turn and become something else, what such terrible things really mean', he says. He eventually continues, 'You're wrong.... The sticks won't sacrifice themselves. Yes, she's grown too big for her boots and they've had enough of her. She must give up her power, hand over her uniform, make way for the big men'. Dulcie 'knows too much', but can evidently be relied on not to speak out (204). After a silence, he says, 'You know, Dulcie will be alright. She'll hang in there by the skin of her teeth and she won't give up a damn thing. Yes ... she won't be sacrificed, by God, she's a witch alright' (205).

It is at this point that the narrator describes a wordless page David handed her long before showing 'the dismembered shapes of a body'; 'I have no doubt,' she says, 'that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page' (205). We as readers cannot doubt at this point that David is complicit in Dulcie's torture. This is moreover the last we see of David; five pages later (after a description of an ANC rally on June 16th, seen largely from the naive point of view of Ouma Sarie, David's mother-in law) we learn of his suicide.

We do however see Dulcie once more, or a surreal vision of Dulcie. As the narrator tends the flowers in her walled winter garden, on the penultimate page of the novel, Dulcie appears:

Only when I turn to go back to work do I see her sturdy steatopygous form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private. She is covered with

goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds; she makes no attempt to wipe the insects away, to shake them off. Instead, she seems grateful for the cover of creatures in the blinding light and under the scorching sun. (212)

As in the vision of Lucy at the end of *Disgrace*, Dulcie blends into a garden scene of flowers and sunlight. The scene of Lucy's flowerbeds in their 'season of blooming' included bees, emblems of fertility (216); this garden scene features undifferentiated 'goggas' (that is, insects or bugs) and, revealingly, they cluster not around the flowers but around Dulcie's body, feasting on its 'syrup sweetness'. Her wounds are 'orifices', entrances into her body, like mouths or vaginas. Lucy is transfigured by her pregnancy: her body is a vehicle in which the future takes shape. Dulcie is comparably transformed, her body too offered up as a sacrifice for the nourishment of others. In these final epiphanies, both women are metamorphosed into emblems of the land, the wounded nation that yet endures and carries within it the seeds of the future.

One yearns for hopeful endings to these two novels of the New South Africa. These visions of violated female bodies melding into blooming and fecund landscapes, however, are in the end profoundly troubling. The equation of women and land is of course a familiar one. Anne McClintock has discussed the gendering of territory to be conquered ('virgin' lands) in imperial discourse, noting that 'the feminising of terra incognita was, from the outset, a strategy of violent containment' (24). Yet this trope appears in postcolonial literature as well, where it is the emerging nation that is likely to be gendered female and seen as an object of love.¹¹ In either, women and the land alike are objects to be desired and possessed by males.¹² The persistence of this trope, not only, in Coetzee's story of a male 'moral dinosaur' but in an account of revolutionaries written by a woman of colour, is disturbing. If we believe that women can hold out hope for the future of the New South Africa, we must surely hope that they will do so in ways that go beyond silently suffering rape, torture, and betrayal and sacrificing their violated bodies for the sustenance of others.

NOTES

- ¹ Dorothy Driver's Afterword to the novel includes useful information about Griqua history; John Matshikiza writes about their troubled status in contemporary South Africa in 'In Search of the Griqua ... and Their Real Leader'. Wicomb herself has written passionately about the complications of coloured identity in 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa'.
- ² André Brink's essay, 'Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature', offers productive insights into the silences that have haunted South African literature. He discusses not only the 'territories forbidden to language' in the apartheid era, but the ways in which 'the very urgencies of a struggle against apartheid encouraged the imposition of other silences' (15). He points also to 'woman as a presence largely

excluded from official South African discourses' (23). Also germane here is Benita Parry's essay in the same volume, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee'; Parry charges that in Coetzee's work 'the consequence of writing the silence attributed to the subjugated as a liberation from the constraints of subjectivity ... can be read as re-enacting the received disposal of narrative authority' (150).

³ In *Life and Times of Michael K*, for instance, the only definitive clue to Michael's racial identity is the obscure annotation 'CM' on a charge sheet (70); few readers will be able to decode this as 'Coloured Male'. In Melanie's case, one clue is David's re-accenting her name: Meláni: the dark one' (18). Another is her boyfriend warning David to 'Stay with your own kind' (194).

⁴ 'Kaaps' as a noun, according to the Dictionary of South African English, means 'the dialect (of Afrikaans or English) spoken by the 'coloured' people of the Western Cape. Coetzee himself explains elsewhere the traditional racial coding of identity designations in Afrikaans: the words *man* and *vrou* are used for white men and women, the words *jong* and *meid* for males and females of other races (1988 131).

⁵ David's particular preoccupation has become the disposal of the dogs' bodies; he personally loads them onto the trolley at the incinerator so that the workers will not smash their rigid limbs with shovels: 'He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it' (146). The most significant change David undergoes is in his attitude towards animals, which can be read as another curious displacement, given that his attitudes towards women do not change markedly, and that there is no indication that his racial attitudes changes at all.

⁶ At least two other critics comment on the reconciliation in this penultimate scene with Lucy among the flowers. Michael Marais sees in it 'a restoration of the filial bond' (176) and claims that 'the scene signifies the irruption of the ethical into the political' (177). Mary Eagleton links this scene to the following, final scene: the dog that David, 'reconciled to Lucy and accepting of her choice' offers up, she suggests 'is the sacrificial lamb but is also a figure for Lucy who has become "like a dog". Lurie offers her up as Abraham offered Isaac.... Lucy offers herself as had her namesake, the Sicilian virgin martyr, St Lucy, one of whose attributes was a silencing wound in the throat' (200).

⁷ Saartje Baartman is the Khoi woman who was displayed in Europe in the early nineteenth century as 'the Hottentot Venus'. The narrator of *David's Story* dismisses David's detailed novelistic account of Baartman, saying, 'There are quite enough of these stories' (135); in her article 'Shame and Identity', Wicomb discusses Baartman as 'an icon of postcoloniality' in the New South Africa (91).

⁸ Dulcie seems to be thinking of what is being done to her own flesh; two pages later she is described as 'Marinated in pain', with 'macerated flesh' (180); can it be that she pictures herself not only as a body sacrificed for the consumption of others, but as meat tenderised and flavoured to appeal to those who consume her?

⁹ David too has faced this possibility: the source of the hit list seems to be his comrades, since David recognises some names 'connected with informers' (114), and we know from the photograph found in his pocket after his death that someone is attempting to frame David himself as a traitor (211).

¹⁰ How anyone knows about them is a mystery, since David says nothing of these torture sessions, the narrator has never spoken to Dulcie, and we cannot in any case imagine Dulcie speaking of them.

- ¹¹ In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, for instance, the central female character, Mumbi, an object of love to all the male protagonists, bears the name of the first woman of Gikuyu mythology. (The creation myth featuring Mumbi and Gikuyu is told in another Ngugi novel, *Weep Not, Child* [32–34]). Another example is the poetry of Dennis Brutus, who addresses South Africa as a lover in, for example, 'Nightsong: Country', which opens: 'All of this undulant earth/ heaves up to me;/ soft curves in the dark distend/ voluptuously-submissively' (44).
- ¹² One is reminded of anthropologist Sherry Ortner's provocative question, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'

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P.G. DU PLESSIS

Our Mouth

In the mornings when I lather my cheeks, my chin, my neck and in the end the areas around my lips — to soften a day's stubble for the shaving ritual — I have to take off my bifocals. I therefore look at my reflection with the unassisted, failing, naked eye. It doesn't matter. The whole process has become automatic anyway: forehand strokes when you go with the nap, backhand against it; leave the upper lip for last and contemplate the white, woolly moustache for a moment before deciding against growing a permanent one.

But every morning, nowadays, it is not my own mouth that emerges from the white foam, but my Grandfather Venter's. I cannot help but recognise the two grooves running down from the corners of the mouth towards the chin. Oh, I remember those! Even when I had shaved Grandpa with the Minora safety blade razor, I had to be very careful when crossing those twin folds. They had nicked easily, just like my modern razor with its pair of safety blades often nicks mine when I deviate from a precisely square-on shaving stroke — the only approach these folds tolerate. The lips I see in my morning mirror are exactly his; the white stubble I had shaved from him is now also mine.

Come to think of it, I never used the cut-throat Krupp to shave him. Those, a book from the forbidden section of the school library had told me, were also used to scar the cheeks of wayward whores — by nattily-dressed gangsters running far-off, exciting, unimaginable houses of ill fame. Our local barber dressed nattily and used a cut-throat. After he had click-click-clicked the hand-operated clipper up the sides of your head (pulling out hair as he went along) to achieve that shortest of short-back-and-sides demanded by your mother, he scraped off whatever traces of down he might have missed on the back and sides of your neck with a Krupp. And while doing that he twisted your head to expose the artery feeding your brain to the honed edge of German steel. He'll then, while looking via the mirror at someone else sitting in the back of his shop, discuss local politics. During his discussion he absentmindedly dry-scraped that blade across your precious artery until he was satisfied that little enough skin was left. Had his blade ever slipped? Had he ever slit?

I knew that twisting of the neck, that baring of arteries and veins, so well. Every fortnight when, in our still fridge-less world, we were down to salted meat, I was told which sheep to slaughter. I fetched it, Grandpa held its hind legs, and I forced back its head to expose the ultimate vulnerabilities of the helpless before a hostile blade: the defenceless throat, the jugular pathways of blood. I then had to

cut fast, and deeply, slicing desperately to sever as much as possible as quickly as possible — to reach the moment when the blade would find the bony joint between spine and skull. Only then could it be slid between the bones to disconnect the marrow-soft, feeling, spinal cord. It was the moment of mercy. The body could then relax into death; the stream of pain that had rushed through the spinal cord at last interrupted. And all that endless while, the warm blood would send its smell-of-life up my nose, would spurt and pulse over my hand, and the last jerks of please-I-want-to-live would shudder up my arms and into my own neck.

I hated it, and Grandpa had to tell me over and over again that there are times when duty and necessity demand that one must sever the stream of feelings from your heart to your head. That was the way he put it. I understood. There are times when one must stand away from your feelings and wants, and just do what has to be done.

Had he himself been able to manage that?

Probably.

At the funeral of one of his most beloved daughters I moved with him among the crowd of mourners, and during a quiet moment in our shuffling, sympathy-interrupted passage I asked him one of those questions only the very young dare ask:

‘Why aren’t you crying, Grandpa?’

He was holding my hand, and at the question he stopped short and looked at me for quite some time. Only after a while did he deem fit to warrant me a serious answer.

‘Grandpa had cried all the tears given to one man, my child ... after our war.’

I noticed that my question had somehow tensed him up, so I didn’t ask when and why he had used up all the tears that had been given to him. But his answer intrigued me. Some years later I remembered that moment and asked Dad about it. For some reason he avoided my eyes when he answered:

‘Someday, when Grandpa thinks you are old enough to understand, he’ll surely tell you himself.’ I had to wait.

In his old age he came to stay with us. It must have been in the forties — almost half a century since the war that had emptied him of tears. But by then I had forgotten about our moment at the funeral.

He turned his arrival that day into a formality. My mother welcomed him at the front door, telling him that she was certain he would have a happy stay with us. Before he entered the house, he insisted on making an announcement. He then made his formal declaration of intent:

‘Annie,’ he told my mother while he held onto her hand, ‘on this day I shall push my feet under your table. I will be a child in your house.’

And he kept his word, that man with the strong body. He was an obedient child in the house, although his hands bore the knuckles he had crushed against other people’s skulls during the wild days when he had earned a living by bringing

mining machinery to Johannesburg by ox-wagon. He never complained. The signs of the hardships he had to endure when he had been left almost destitute by the scorched earth policy of the English during the war could be seen in his gnarled fingers — and it was discernible in his total trust in God and his obstinate will-to-believe.

At the time of Grandpa's arrival, the Second World War was raging in Europe. Dad was a teacher, interested and meticulous. At night, when no unexpected visitors were liable to turn up any more, he secretly plotted the course of the war — sticking bead-headed, coloured pins into a map. The existence of the map, Ma told me almost daily, should never be mentioned to anyone. There were people from the Truth Legion everywhere and any whisper could reach their ears. If they found out that Dad listened to the German news he would be interned, and lose his teaching post. The map with the rows of pins moving across the middle of Europe fascinated me. When a line of pins moved to a new front, or over yet another bit of conquered territory, they left little holes in the map. I tried to picture what those little holes in the spots where the war had passed represented: blocks of neat crosses, or mass graves, or To get a true picture of what was happening in Europe, Dad listened to both the English and German news bulletins. It was exciting to wait until it was dark before stealthily threading the long aerial of the whistling, short-wave Arvin wireless through the mulberry trees. All that so that a certain Strauss, after the slow, ominous tolling of ship's bells, death knells, could announce in a cavernous voice: 'Today seven/ten/fifteen! Allied ships were sent to the bottom....'

After listening to that, my nights were filled with people floundering among debris and burning oil-slicks in the dark cold waters of the northern oceans I had read about. I tried to imagine what drowning like that would feel like. — Swimming, swimming, swimming and desperately hoping until the tired muscles of your shoulders would just give up from cold and exhaustion. And then you'll sink, incapable of fighting for air any longer and gulping the seawater into your lungs. Or the horror of the burning oil-slick enveloping you like a bad dream and how you dive under it, only to have to surface and singe your lungs when gasping for air. Do you then think of the distant dry land where you needn't fight for some precious air? For just one more breath? And, perhaps, when you surrender to the inevitable, you'll be filled by a sorrow — for yourself and for the things you'll never feel again. Like the warmth of people. It was at that time that the sadness of our brevity began to clog my hopes like lime quietly settling in kettles and pipes.

In the evenings — always winter in my memories — when the mealie-cob fire roared in the Ellis de Luxe stove and the next person's bath-water was being heated in the copper boiler, the light of the Miller lamp would highlight Grandpa's Jan Smuts goatee. It would move up and down when he told me of what had happened at Magersfontein, Rooiwal and between the enclosing lines of blockhouses and barbed wire.

To my young mind, these things had thankfully happened far back in the distant past. All those dead people were not like the corpses of those I had known — those who were at that very moment rotting and stinking in the pitch-dark hollows shut in by the coffins of my imagination; those who, please God, must get through their bloating and decay to become acceptably dry bones.

The Scots who died at Magersfontein, for example, had already reached a state of skeletal acceptability. Later on, Grandpa accompanied me to the battlefield at Magersfontein and showed me the spot where he and his brother Tjaart had spent that violent day. With them was an unlucky neighbour who got shot through the head early that morning. Nobody could find the time to remove the corpse and it lay in the hot sun the whole day. Late that afternoon the steadily bloating body turned over by itself and in doing so one of its hands ‘tapped me on the back’.

Right up to the end, Grandpa vainly tried to understand why his startled reaction had given rise to such mirth:

‘How could we, with the smell of death and the din of battle all around us, and with our heads aching from the lyddite fumes coming from the bombs the British showered on the hill behind us ... how could we have laughed so much? I’m still ashamed about that. ... But by that time I had already put so many rounds through the Mauser, and I had seen so many people fall ... and I had seen a neighbour, a man I knew well, jerk like a shot ox when the bullet hit his head. Our shoulders were black and blue for weeks after that and the barrels of our rifles became so hot that we didn’t dare load a full magazine — we had to shove the cartridges into the breech one by one. The magazines could explode, the breeches were that hot. They were so hot that when one spat on them the spittle would run along the steel in a small ball — like on a heated stove. Perhaps that was why we lost our dignity.’

Those evenings, after having stayed with Grandpa in front of the stove as long as I was allowed, I could go to bed with ease. Bones were all that were left of those Scots. I could snuggle into the soft eiderdown surrounded by harmless dead Scotsmen — abstract corpses with red, sunburnt legs. I could savour the bravery of the Hoopstad commando holding off the terrible Lancers with the butts of their rifles in fierce hand-to-hand encounters. I could slip through the blockhouse lines during the long nights of flight when sleeping burghers had fallen from their horses without waking so that they had to be kicked to wake up. I could imagine prisoner-of-war camps where ‘... a louse would go for you at such a pace that it kicked up a small cloud of dust...’

In all the things Grandpa told me, there was one certainty: he had done the right thing. Right through.

‘Aren’t you afraid of death, Grandpa?’ I once asked him.

‘I made my peace with the Lord at the time the English sentenced me to death. So why ask, Pietman?’ Grandpa did not fear death — he had made his peace with the Lord.

Confirmation of his unshakeable convictions hung on the wall above his bed — an embossed slogan in an old brown frame:

EBEN HAËZER

UP TO HERE THE LORD HAS HELPED US.

Late in the afternoons of those days I strolled with Dad across the commonage of our town, talking about Tennyson whom he was teaching me to read properly. Some of the lines he quoted from the *Morte d'Arthur* on one of those afternoons, obviously disturbed him. After having sent Sir Bedivere many times, Arthur finally embarks for his voyage to the other world. On that boat he is destined to drift further and further away from this life's shores until he will become a mere speck on the far-off horizon of the lake.

And King Arthur said to me in Dad's voice, with Dad's understanding and in Dad's heavy Afrikaans accent:

*But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest — if indeed I go —
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion...*

off to the green fields of the hereafter

Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

And Dad added, for we had earlier also spoken about Grandpa:

*...Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories...*

And about the history of sorrow and remembrance:

And on the mere the wailing died away.

The repeated parentheses of doubts were for Dad, on that afternoon, suddenly more than just another small problem of interpretation. He was disturbed, perhaps moved, by the multiplying meanings emanating from the *if indeed I go* and the *clouded with a doubt*.

'Dad, are you afraid of death?' I asked him.

He evaded my question, and I realise now that he must have known what he wanted to say, but decided against saying it. I was too young to handle his gnawing doubts. So he only quoted in answer:

'(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)'

But shortly after that, and for the first time, he voiced another doubt:

'I am more concerned about the *grievous wound*... and about how long my people are going to persist in what they're doing. You must try to understand how far the simplest of words can reach. Tennyson puts it very simply: *And on the mere the wailing died away*. If you read it well enough, you'll find a stack of meanings. Pick yours.'

He was silent for the rest of our stroll. I nagged a bit, but he stonewalled me with evasions, if that is possible. He did, however, provide a clue that evening.

He turned up where I was doing my homework and put an opened book before me, indicating a line with his finger. It read:

'The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature...'

'Us,' was the only word he said.

In 1948 the National Party, preaching apartheid, came to power. I now realise how strikingly near the middle of the century that fateful year came along. Our lives — those of Grandpa, Dad and my own — had been destined to span the 20th century with an overlapping succession of generations. Grandpa's watershed war against the British lasted from 1899 to 1902. It was there that he exhausted the full measure of whatever tears his trusted God had shared out to him. Queen Victoria and colonialism left the stage then. Dad was born seven days after the first shots had been fired. I made it to the end of the century, coping with a new South Africa and guilt.

In 1948 — it was ten at night — Jan Smuts, Prime Minister at the time, who had been a Boer general but had ended up a Field-Marshal for the British, lost his parliamentary seat. Standerton it was. It was quite a moment for all around, but certainly not for me. It was my job to see to it that the batteries stayed charged, so that the adults could listen without interruption to the election results coming from the battery-driven Arvin radio. I had to charge those batteries with a small, red-painted, hateful and exceptionally headstrong little petrol engine called a Tiny Tim. The garage owner, Uncle Lucas, had by then already announced that this particular Tiny Tim had reached the final stages of inner decay: 'This damn charger's tappets can't be adjusted anymore. Tell your Dad.' Dad found a way to do just that — temporarily, that is. Step one: open up the engine. Two: put a spent .22 cartridge case over the foot of the valve's stem. Three: reassemble. Four: try to start it until your pulling arm aches and your hand grabbing the starter-rope blisters. Then, perhaps, Tiny Tim would find the tappet-gap, adjusted by an all too soft .22 cap, to its liking and clatter into life. Charge until the soft copper has given up and the engine sighs to a standstill. Take the battery in, bring the other one back to the engine. Repeat.

Every time I delivered my inadequately charged battery I could feel the tension rising. Three sets of ears were glued to the radio: those of Grandpa, Dad and Reverend Potgieter. They could sense that the National Party was moving towards an election victory. Their very souls wanted that to happen.

Between announcements — I once overheard during one of my brief visits to the group — Grandpa was telling what President Kruger had to say about Smuts, his youthful State Attorney at the time. And how, in Grandpa's opinion, Smuts had curried the enemy's favour and had 'renegaded' himself towards a Field-Marshal's baton.

'How Smuts could crawl like some bitch before his conquerors, I'll never understand. After the camps! God! After what happened in those camps!'

He had never spoken to me about those concentration camps. Whatever I knew about them I had gathered from books and from the stories of a great-aunt who had survived them. But I can remember how the photographs of emaciated children, and dead children, and children about to die, had turned my stomach, and how I had tried to picture the 26,000 bodies of women and children arranged against a hill. How many schools could all those children fill? On the mantelpiece of that great-aunt there used to be a small bottle with pieces of metal and some crystals — things she said the British had put into the inmates' food rations. After her death it vanished. I never asked whether they had buried it with her. She had lost three children in the concentration camps. Perhaps someone found it appropriate to bury her little bottle of anger with her other sad memories.

Later on, when the politics of Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd had developed into a working system — Grandpa had by then already been a speck on the horizon of the mere for quite some while — Dad visited me in my study. He browsed through my books and on reaching his beloved Dickens, he took *A Tale of Two Cities* from the shelf. He found the passage he was looking for almost immediately and read out loud the words he had pointed out to me when I had been so much younger: '*The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature...*' And in our moment of privacy he added:

'(For all my mind is clouded...) What are we doing, my son? What *grievous wound* are we inflicting on ourselves at this very moment? ... while hurting others? How many years and generations will it take before your great-great-grandchildren dare say: *And on the mere the wailing died away*. (Sorry, I should have quoted that in the past perfect....) Your Grandfather had such a wound. And it cried out for a lifetime. ... Marcus Antonius's image, not mine.'

He had mentioned Grandpa's death, so I returned to that other paradox we had analysed together when I was young:

'*I am going a long way/ With these thou seest...* Had Grandpa actually seen what he said he had seen? What do you really think?'

'Your mother believes he did.' It was not an answer and I think he wanted it that way.

During holidays when I returned home from university — where I played around more than I studied — I used to shave Grandpa. That was when I saw his mouth emerging from the thick lather I had whipped up in his shaving mug and applied with his old-fashioned shaving brush. Mother had asked me to do it: 'Your Grandpa is constantly nicking himself. He doesn't shave himself properly anymore.'

I liked shaving him. So much so that I prolonged the process, because I found that while shaving him I could discover an intimacy very rare among the men of my family.

So close to his skin, I allowed myself to ask him about the origins of the marks, blemishes, spots and lines which, now that he was getting old, were

appearing on his otherwise remarkably smooth skin. Skin's memory, I thought it should be called. All the hurts of the past will eventually present themselves like browned memories in what my mother called 'grave marks'. (She never used those words in the presence of older people.) The pain that had caused the blemishes of old age is forgotten, but the memory of it will belatedly emerge — surely, brownly and indelibly. 'Forgiveness without forgetting,' as they say in the peacemaking business. Shaving him was like those nights in front of the stove when the stories of war poured from him. He remembered the origin of every grave mark, and he told each one's story in detail:

About how he had crushed one knuckle on the scull of a crooked shopkeeper who had kept on and on miscounting the eggs Grandpa was selling him; about how the barbs of the farm fence got at him when a stubborn mare went wild. Every brown spot had a story. I loved listening to his tales about the days when he had been young and strong — the days when a something wild must have stirred his blood.

'Revolving memories...?' Dad remarked with a smile. 'Or are you counting genes again?'

Dad was teasing me, I knew. He was alluding to something that had happened between us in my final year at school. I was minding my own business in my room when the door flew open and Dad tossed a book onto my bed. Tossing the book is putting it too mildly. He made the book flutter through the air like only an experienced teacher can — on giving vent to the frustration which is part of the job. But at that moment Dad was not to be trifled with. He was furious and there was no gainsaying his command: 'Read that book from cover to cover! I am sick and tired of Calvinists who haven't read Calvin and then go into the world and ascribe a lot of theological garbage to him.'

Dad hated blatant stupidity, especially stupidity backed up by misplaced self-confidence. For the best part of forty years he had been an elder in the Dutch Reformed Church and therefore a member of the local church council. He came home from such a church council meeting in a fury one day. He was an old man by then and he had already retired after having spent almost half a century of his life trying to teach reluctant, anti-English pupils the rudiments of the enemy's language. Those reluctants were by then his colleagues in the church council.

'I can't take it any longer!' he raged. 'To sit there among them, knowing I've tried to teach every one of them at least something ... knowing each one's IQ, knowing exactly what each of them never could understand...' He had run out of sentence, but he eventually made his point: 'Long before any honourable individual brother in that council gets onto his hind-legs to have his say, I know exactly what kind of bullshit he's going to spout!'

He used that kind of language sparingly. I took it that they must have upset him no end.

But the upshot of all this came down rather heavily on my Dad's son. It was I who had to struggle through a shortened, Dutch version of Calvin's *Institutes*. But in a way, my forced incursions into Calvin's thoughts did have some worthwhile spin-offs. It got me onto the gene counting my dad had mentioned. Calvin brought a further theme to my heated arguments during my late afternoon walks with Dad: predestination it's called and it boils down to a rather unsettling concept. Long before any soul is sent into this earthly life, it says, its ultimate fate has been decided. Hell or Heaven, there's no way of evading God's binding decisions on what you are going to do, sin, enjoy, achieve, and what-not. That's putting it a bit crudely, but there it was. Highly unfair, I decided. We went up and down the paths of argument and simply had to stumble onto another rather dicey subject: original sin. Highly unfair, I argued once more. How can a child be held responsible for the shortcomings and transgressions of his parents and grandparents? And guilt, the story goes, reaches back four or five generations to get at some totally innocent soul who didn't even have the pleasure of meeting the original sinner. I just didn't buy it, nor did the lost paradise make any sense.

A cloud of disturbing thoughts haunted me for months. And then I found the answer and argued my point with a persistency given only to the adolescent philosopher. I argued: When conception takes place you have two cells joining up. Right? Sperm and ovum become one. Fine? They swap genes and join chromosomes and things and then the first division takes place. Still with me? Now let's see what had happened: the ovum had been a physical part of the mother, the sperm came, physically, from the father. So, and that's the point, in the new life you have the physical continuance of the biological father and mother — their physical features, their quirks and such things. Children *are* their parents. Physically. Mixed, yes, but still. So now to get to the problem of crime and punishment ... if one has a combination of...

Calvin, Eve and biology turned me into an argumentative bore for months. Poor Dad, he had to hear all this. Ad nauseam. At some of my statements he could only smile: 'If I am then half my mother and half my father, and they are half their mothers and fathers, then one half of me fought in the Boer war — the one quarter getting caught, the other sticking it out to the bitter end. And my one female quarter survived the camps and still another quarter stayed out of British hands by fleeing to Bechuanaland.' Heavy!

That was why, when he saw me shaving Grandpa, Dad remarked:

'Now take care with that razor! You don't want to nick your forequarter...'

But carefully dragging the razor through the lather to expose Grandpa's facial grave marks one by one brought me an uncanny sense of identification — and a togetherness and nearness.

So I puzzled with him about the one he couldn't place. The one he couldn't explain. It was very clearly an old abrasion or cut. It was elongated — a brown line running from just beneath his right eye down to the middle of his cheek. It

must have some origin, he mused, but he just couldn't remember where that one had come from.

'It's almost as if my head doesn't want to remember this one,' he told me.

About a month before his death he suddenly remembered.

He couldn't wait to tell me:

'Pietman, I now remember the incident as if it had happened yesterday.'

'What are you talking about, Grandpa?'

'The long one that runs down my cheek.'

'And...?'

'The day I had to leave for commando duty, my youngest little daughter insisted on getting onto the horse with me for a hug and a kiss. Her mother picked her up and handed her to me. We always did that when I had to go somewhere. It was our way of saying goodbye. But that day she didn't want to let go of me and in the end they had to tear her away. It was one of her nails that left a thin scratch-mark on my cheek. It was a slight little wound, but it didn't heal quickly. I remember it was still open when we fought at Magersfontein.'

His explanation left me furious and I confronted my mother about it that night:

'I thought I knew everything that there is to know about my Grandpa! Why have you never told me that he had a wife and children before he married Grandma?'

Mom's answer was soft, almost hesitant:

'My child, why has Grandpa not told you himself?'

My mother was good at answers like that one. But in the end she did give me the gist of Grandpa's life before the war and before Grandma came into his life.

What had happened to him was almost everyday during the war: people losing people, wives losing husbands, mothers losing sons — and so on and on right through all the cruel permutations of loss that war brings in its wake. Before the war, Grandpa had been married to a young woman called Lettie and they had had two little daughters. All three of them died in the concentration camps. After the war the young widower married Grandma Venter. They had seven children, with Mom the eldest. My grandmother's name was Nettie. The young wife who had died in the war was called Lettie.

While shaving Grandpa the next morning, I asked him about his first marriage.

He didn't tell me about their courtship or about their early married life or about the birth of their children. He suddenly, passionately, began to tell me about the day he stepped off the prisoner-of-war train — about the high hopes he had had in his heart when they had approached the last station; about his expectations and the excitement that had pulsed through his body; about the desolation of a burnt farm with no living creature left on it; about searching for his family. He went to Bloemfontein's concentration camp. They gave him lists to scan — lists of names naming the living and the dead. He followed all trails, and someone told him that he had seen a young woman and two little girls in Aliwal Noord's

concentration camp. He hired a horse with his last money and almost killed the animal in his haste to get there. They were not there. Their names were not on the lists of the living and the dead. He went to Kimberley by train, pleading with the guard to ignore him.

He found the three names in Kimberley's lists, but only two graves. It was there that he wept the full quota of tears given to one man. For them, and for the futility of it all.

'I did all the crying I had in me there. I could never cry after that,' he said.

But for the first time since I've known him, I saw a tear slowly finding it's way through the shaving lather on his cheeks.

I didn't ask any more questions and I didn't have much of an opportunity either, for the next time I returned home it was because Grandpa had had a stroke and had asked for me.

I went directly to his room on my arrival. From the doorway I saw that he had his precious Book of Psalms in his hands. I stopped short because I didn't want to disturb him. He had always prepared for communion in his church (Reformed, not Dutch Reformed like my parents') by first reading from the Bible (not very fluently) then singing a Psalm all on his own (slightly off key) and then saying a prayer in broken Dutch (with all the beauty of absolute belief sounding in his words).

But the stroke had impaired his reading. I had to greet him by taking his left hand, and for the first time since I had been accepted as an adult male among the males of my family who just didn't do such things, I bent over him and kissed his forehead.

It was the following morning that Mom, after she had washed him — I had to shave him, he insisted — emerged from his room with the story.

'Frikkie,' she said to Dad, 'it seems to me the stroke has affected a larger part of the brain than we first thought.'

They must have had previous discussions on the matter and she filled me in: 'This is now the third morning that your Grandfather says the strangest things. He almost begs me not to blame him after his death for something he doesn't want to name. Not only me, but also my brothers and sisters — the children he had with your Grandma Venter. I cannot get him to say anything more. Something about us is bothering him.'

On the fourth morning Grandpa went slightly further with his strange request.

'Annie,' he said to Mom, 'you — and your brothers and sisters — must not think that I loved your mother and her children less than I had loved Lettie and her two little daughters who died in the camps. You must remember that after I have gone.'

Mom said she hadn't quite known what to say to that, so she replied:

'But Father, we all know you and our mother had a beautiful relationship and you have always been a good father to us. Why does it bother you...?'

‘I just want you all to know.’

On the fifth morning Mom came out of his room in tears. She repeated Grandpa’s words to us:

‘Annie, I know my time is near. But I don’t want you to think that your late mother and you children meant less to me than Lettie and the two little girls. But Annie, you must understand ... it is now four days that I know I’m going. And I shall go gladly, because each morning when I wake up I see Lettie and my two little girls standing in that corner — waiting for me to come.’

The romantic streak in Mom made her cry. She clung to Dad’s hand and spoke of the one great love in every life. His grip tightened on her hand in recognition of their own, but to me he said:

‘That was his *grievous wound*. In actual fact he’s only saying *I am going a long way/ With these thou seest...* But it will take generations before the horrifying wails coming from the wounds of this land will die away on the mere of time. The leprosy of unreality saw to that.’

On that morning, for the very last time, I saw how that particular mouth of ours emerged from the lather. I did not need a mirror to see it, I saw it with the naked eye. Clearly.

But in the mornings, nowadays, in front of my own mirror, I am shaving grave marks from the foam. I know now that there’s a quota to a man’s tears, and I can see how myopic the naked eye can become. Our mouth is but a wound, and dying away means what it says.

HEILNA DU PLOOY

Traces of Identity in the Mirror of the Past

INTRODUCTION

The rewriting of history is a prominent trend in contemporary Afrikaans fiction in South Africa. In the debates and discussions on the narrative texts which take historical situations and events as their point of departure, questions about the relevancy of rewriting the past for the present or the future naturally arise. This essay is based on research done in a larger project concerned with mapping the various ways in which Afrikaans narrative texts, novels and short stories published between 1990 and the year 2000, interact with history.¹ This essay focuses on a specific short story 'Our mouth' by P.G. du Plessis² in which aspects of individual and collective identity are investigated by reflecting on the history of three generations of a family against the background of the collective national history.

BACKGROUND

The story 'Our mouth' is set against the background of South African history in the twentieth century and refers to a number of important historical events. It is also necessary to keep in mind the colonial history of South Africa. South Africa was a Dutch colony from 1652 when the Dutch sent a small group of people to the Cape to establish a halfway station to provide passing ships going to the East with fresh food and water. In 1814, at the European settlement after the Napoleonic wars, the Cape became a British crown colony by formal cession. The British officials applied a policy of anglicising the almost completely non-British population so as to rule the colony more effectively and this became one of the reasons for the Great Trek in the 1830s when Dutch settlers moved deeper and deeper into the interior. This can be seen as an early decolonising move and by the middle of the nineteenth century two independent Boer Republics had been established in the northern part of Southern Africa. The Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) was a war between these two Republics and Britain.

This war was an event of crucial importance in shaping the course of South African history. The Afrikaners who had resisted the anglicising policies of the English governments from the beginning, came to resent the British even more because of their war policy of burning farmsteads and removing women and children (and also some of the black population) to concentration camps. The British believed that this was the only way to counter the guerrilla fighting tactics of the Boers who kept getting fresh supplies from the farms. One of the terrible

consequences of this war policy was that 26,000 white women and children died in the camps because of malnutrition and illnesses such as measles and mumps which reached epidemic proportions. The war was followed by another period of anglicising in schools and churches and public institutions.

In 1910 the four provinces of South Africa formed a union which although still designated as a crown colony represented the first step in a second process of decolonisation. The move towards independence was sustained by a developing nationalism amongst Afrikaners. In 1948 the Nationalist Party, which had the support of most Afrikaners, came into power. The Afrikaners were so intent on what they regarded as their decolonisation from Britain that they did not pay sufficient attention to the deteriorating racial relations which presented the gravest problem the government had to contend with. After 1948 the black freedom movements intensified their struggle for freedom from all forms of European suppression and this can be regarded as a third wave of decolonisation which culminated in the elections of 1994 after which the ANC became the official government of South Africa.³

The dilemma in the story 'Our mouth' has to do with the feelings of guilt that Afrikaners are at present suffering from because of the legacy of Apartheid. In trying to gain some perspective on the factors determining the historical events of the past 50 years one has to look back further. Though Afrikaners were the victims in the Anglo-Boer War, they were also part of the political dispensation in which Apartheid was the main policy and are therefore also guilty of suppression. The relation between collective guilt and individual responsibility or individual guilt and collective responsibility is a burning issue in South Africa. Afrikaners experience intense discomfort with the recent past but are also aware of the influence of other traumas on the lives of the people of previous eras. They try to understand history and their own decisions by searching for reasons or explanations for the course history has taken. Feelings of guilt and self-reproach are reflected in many contemporary Afrikaans literary texts which concern themselves with historical issues (Du Plooy 2000, 2001).

'Our mouth' was published in 1998 as part of a collection of newly-written short stories on the heritage of the Anglo-Boer War, one hundred years after the event. The most important common characteristic of these stories is that they are stories about individuals and about families (in many cases based on true family stories) and not about the official political aspects of history as such, so that the differences between individual experience and the political and ideological reportage of official historical accounts are highlighted in a number of ways.

TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRIKAANS LITERATURE

From the 1970s onward and especially during the 1980s the thematic content of literature in Afrikaans was mainly directed at the political struggle of the day. This was the case for the greater part of those texts which are regarded as

noteworthy works of literature by scholars.⁴ After the announcement of the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC in February 1990 and even more so after the elections of 1994 when the ANC took over the government of South Africa, the question was often asked: What are writers in South Africa going to write about now? The intimation was that the abundance of politically relevant and emotionally charged themes would be drastically diminished after the ideals of the struggle had been fulfilled. The well-known novelist André Brink acknowledged in a lecture (in September 1999)⁵ that authors in South Africa were indeed concerned about this in the same way that eastern European authors were after the Berlin Wall had been demolished.

Looking back over the last decade, it becomes clear that the new freedom experienced in the country seems to have acted as an impetus, not only as far as the number of books published in Afrikaans is concerned (even though publishing has become more difficult),⁶ but especially in the significant widening of thematic scope and the regeneration of a variety of literary genres and styles (see du Plooy 2001).

THE FOCUS ON HISTORY

One of the salient trends in Afrikaans narrative literature of the 1990s is an intense concern with history. Though it might seem to be a movement away from the actuality of present circumstances, this is not the case: by exploring the past, authors are investigating the origins or the determining forces which have shaped contemporary situations. They do find in the past the bad seeds from which the present has developed and in many cases a rather negative individual and collective identity emerges from these texts.⁷ They are however, also rediscovering that which is worthwhile and valuable in their cultural and individual heritage and are struggling to find ways and means by which this legacy can be reformulated and inserted into constructions or reconstructions of new variable and developing identities.

Contextual as well as literary conditions are at present conducive to stocktaking and re-evaluation in South Africa. Most prominent are the political changes in the country. South Africa is simultaneously trying to demolish the remnants of colonialism and to build a future which inevitably still rests in some respects on the legacy of colonialism. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission encouraged an atmosphere of confession, revelation and repositioning. There is also the general trend to embark on re-examinations of the course of history in the previous century induced by the turn of the century and the advent of a new millennium.

Postcolonial and postmodernist ideas have a strong influence on the Afrikaans literary scene as is evident in the literary strategies or writing techniques used as well as in the philosophical thought that underpins the works of literature. Aspects of postmodernism which are particularly relevant here are the questioning and

undermining of the validity of accepted master narratives, and the disregard for the boundaries between fiction and fact or reality. There is also a marked consciousness that all linguistic representations are volatile and unreliable, whether these refer to reality or to historiographical or fictional texts. As Hans Bertens puts it: '[n]o matter whether they are esthetic, epistemological, moral or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted' (11).⁸

A variety of strategies are used to cope with the complexities of representing historical material. Even though I distrust classifications of literary data, the various ways in which Afrikaans texts interact with history can be loosely organised into distinguishable categories. On a sliding scale these range from a documentary approach, as in *faction* or new journalism, to creative reconstructions by means of new myths or through the use of magic realism. In between these two extremes there are the ordinary traditional and 'realistic' historical novels, different types of ego documents (biographies and autobiographical texts) and testimonial literature. In some texts stories or aspects of history are retold or rewritten from alternative points of view by using children, women, or people from previously silenced sectors of the community as focalisers or narrators. There are various examples of what can be called genealogical literature and a variety of creative re-interpretations of documents.⁹

THE ANGLO-BOER WAR (1899–1902)

In South Africa in general as well as in Afrikaans literature the focus on history has been intensified by the commemoration of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902).¹⁰ The stories and novels about this War reflect the same spectrum of possibilities mentioned above, but the ABW was also an important factor in the development of a collective national identity of Afrikaner people and has had an immense influence on the national psyche, especially for people in the northern part of the country. Representations of the ABW have undergone a number of changes and looking back over a hundred years one can see how the War has been reported, interpreted and used, how it has been mythologised and demythologised repeatedly depending on the reason for the reconstruction and on the person by whom it is made.

Four distinct phases can be distinguished in writings on the ABW (Swanepoel). The first phase of literary representation is the period directly after the War, that is from 1902–1910. Literature from this period can be described as 'testimony' and much of it is written in Dutch. Testimonial literature of this kind performed a therapeutic function when it was published and it played an important part in the reconstitution of the community. These texts contain stories about hardship and suffering but also about bravery and they can be understood as a way of making sense of the hardships of a community which has lost everything.

The texts about the ABW which were produced during the second period, 1910–1934, can in a large part be described as memoirs, in which the discursive formations are constructed on the basis of memory and recollections, by using notes, diaries and documents that include the testimonies of the first period. Inevitably these representations are more structured, as they select certain elements and impose a specific order on the basic narrative material in order to elicit a specific response. These texts clearly contain examples of fictionalisation and manipulation which work in opposite ways. In some texts, certain aspects of the war history are emphasised to inspire people and to restore the individual and collective self respect of those who have lost the war. On the other hand, some texts underplay the suffering in order to promote conciliation between Afrikaner and English people in the country (for example, *Commando* by Deneys Reitz and the Preface to this book written by Jan Smuts who was a prominent political leader).

In the texts which appeared between 1934 and 1948 the ABW is often used as part of a programme of political propaganda. History and memory become cultural instruments in the drive for political power. The aim is to unite people through recognition of shared hardship in the past, and a national identity is constructed on the basis of this unity.

In the years after 1948 much less was written about the ABW as people became preoccupied with more immediate concerns. Of course some texts about the War were still published, but they are not regarded by literary historians and critics (Swanepoel) as either important documents or important literary achievements and one can speak of a period of silence as far as the ABW is concerned. One exception here is the novel *Magersfontein o Magersfontein* by Etienne Leroux (1976), a complex satirical work in which a reconstruction of the battle of Magersfontein becomes a scathing social critique on/of Afrikaner and South African culture.

Since the late 1980s however, a new awareness of the importance of the historical dimension of reality has been developing. In most cases, however, history is not explored for its own sake, but becomes a metaphor, a vehicle, a broken mirror presenting a twisted reflection. The past, however, does in some way or other contain the elements from which the present has evolved. Authors probe the past in an attempt to understand the nuances and subtle meanings of events, using new insights as lenses through which the present and the future can be contemplated. Memories and histories are thus re-evaluated and discursive and narrative reformulations become part of a redefinition of identity. The story, 'Our Mouth' by P.G. du Plessis (published in Afrikaans in 1998) is an example of the complex way in which past and present interact in the lives of people, and incorporates a number of the trends and techniques mentioned above.

GENETIC LINKS

The story deals with three generations of a family against the backdrop of the political developments in South Africa. The title 'Our Mouth' ('Ons Mond') already gives an indication of something shared. What is shared here, is the likeness between the narrator and his grandfather. This likeness not only binds them together irrevocably with ties of blood and love, but also becomes a metaphor for the way in which people are always bound to their past.

The genealogical link is a prominent feature of the story which can be seen as a personalised history. Like many others which have been published over the last few years, this story does not retell the official or well-known versions of ABW but looks at individual experience. These little narratives not only supplement the official historiographical accounts of the war and its consequences, but challenge the master narratives which often harness the experiences of individuals for collective ideological purposes.

In the story, the grandfather, who fought in the ABW forty years ago as a young married man, comes to live with his daughter and her family after the death of his wife. His life is haunted by memories and by the grief he experienced during and after the War as he has never completely succeeded in overcoming the trauma of this period in his life. It is almost as if this suffering has numbed him to such an extent that any subsequent pain is insignificant by comparison and has to be borne stoically. When he does not cry at the funeral of one of his daughters, his grandson asks him why he does not cry, and he replies: 'Grandpa had cried all the tears given to one man, my child ... after our War' (2).

Although to a certain extent, the Grandfather's personal grief is assuaged by political victories of the Afrikaner people, especially by the coming into power of the Nationalist Party in 1948, it never really leaves him. The story also shows that not only the suffering itself, but also the way in which he deals with and endures his suffering, determines his life. As he only looks back, the past becomes the measure of his present and his future. It is as if it limits his ability to grasp what is really happening in the present. The War remains the central event of his life and becomes the measure by which all subsequent political events, such as the election of 1948 and the changes in fortune of politicians like Jan Smuts are evaluated.¹¹ When the National Party wins the election in 1948, with the policy of separate development which later became known as Apartheid as part of their campaign, the grandfather still agonises over the fact that Jan Smuts turned his back on the people who had suffered with him during the War and preferred to associate with the English: 'And how, in Grandpa's opinion Smuts had curried the enemy's flavour and had "renegaded" himself towards a Field-Marshal's baton' (6). It is as if, for the grandfather, that which has been lost becomes all the more precious as time passes. This is more than simply a clinging to the past, it is rather a way of cherishing and trying to keep alive by means of fond recollection the ideas and ideals which have been taken away forcibly. It reminds one of what Derek Walcott

said in his Nobel Prize lecture: 'Break a vase and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole' (qtd in de Kok 62).

The grandfather's son-in-law is an English teacher and, according to the narrator, a very good English teacher. As a thinking man he sets store by his intellectual approach to reality. By listening to radio broadcasts from Germany as well as to the reports from the Allied forces, he keeps track of what is happening during World War II. Soon after 1948 he realises that political sentiment and practical developments under the National Party Government are taking the wrong direction. He wants to develop his son's awareness by pointing out the fallacies which form the basis of the political dispensation. He fears that even greater trauma lies ahead and is indeed being fostered by the policies of the day.

Though the story openly acknowledges the fact that the mistakes of the past determine subsequent developments in a country, the story does not denounce that heritage completely or unconditionally. The story begins and ends with a reference to the physical likeness between grandfather and grandson. This emphasises the bond between them and suggest that one cannot disclaim one's heritage. The past cannot be forgotten or left behind — it remains part of people's lives and of their identity including both that which is valuable and irreplaceable and that which is harmful and intolerable.

DOUBTS

Some wars are further removed from the reality of the present than others. For the grandfather the ABW never goes away, but for the grandson the battles of Magersfontein and Rooiwal are quite remote. They have become harmless — mere entertaining adventures in the mind of the young boy. The people who drown when the ships are sunk in World War II, the people who are gasping for air in icy water, are much closer to him. This war is part of the present and affects him directly — it is almost too close to endure.

For the young boy the stories that his grandfather tells him and the news of the casualties of World War II lead to thoughts about death. The grandfather does not fear death and never questions the way he sees life and death. He regards everything in a simple direct way, does what he believes he has to do, suffers what he is destined to suffer and carries his responsibilities without complaint. The father, however, is concerned about the new wounds which are being inflicted by the governmental policies in the present. Where the grandfather has a fixed nineteenth-century worldview, the father questions accepted views and has doubts about political and metaphysical issues. To make his son aware of the complexities of life, he chooses not to lecture him but rather to quote from literature. When they go for walks together, the father talks about literature and uses the stories and poems to get his son to think for himself. He uses Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur', for instance, to point out that one can never be completely sure about anything:

‘(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)’ (5). The grandfather is sure of his destiny in life hereafter, but for people from the following generations it is not so easy to take everything for granted, especially not where religion is concerned. Under the guidance of the father, the son indeed becomes the one to ask questions. Arthur was not sure what was waiting for him and the father uses Arthur’s uncertainty to give expression to his own doubts. Encouraged by his father, the son develops a more inquisitive mind than the grandfather.

The father is most concerned about political developments and though he respects the grandfather’s sentiments, he cannot but be conscious of the wrongs of the present. He clearly sees how the tendency to cling to the past, to look back, to cherish the ‘grievous wound’ of the past, affects the present situation in a negative way. The wound inflicted on the Boers in the ABW was indeed a ‘grievous wound’, but one should not allow the past to obscure one’s view of the present and the future. He emphasises the point he wants to make by referring repeatedly to a phrase in Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*: ‘The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature’ (5), thereby suggesting that a new wound is being inflicted on others and this wound is affecting the humanity of every human creature in the country. Grave wounds have a way of crying for a long time, he explains, quoting Marcus Antonius’ words (7), therefore he is not only concerned about the wound of the past, but also about the wounds of the present. The suggestion is that the hurt inflicted on people by the Apartheid policies may lead to renewed ‘wailing on the mere’, not only for the victims but also for the perpetrators and their children and grandchildren (7).

MARKED BY HISTORY

History not only shapes people mentally, but also physically. The physical marks, in turn, bear witness to the events that have shaped the minds and lives of people. While pointing to the dangers of living in the past, the story shows great compassion for the grandfather. When the grandson comes home during holidays, his mother asks him to help his grandfather to shave. He does this gladly because he loves to hear the stories which can only be told when people are really close in an intimate space. He asks his grandfather about all the marks and scars on his hands and arms and face and for every mark there is a story. It is as if the grandfather’s history is written on his body and his face, like the city in Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*: ‘the city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps ... every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls’ (13).

The grandfather seems to have forgotten the origin of one thin scar running from the side of his eye to the middle of his cheek. Much later, shortly before his death, he does remember. When he left the farm to join the commando during the ABW, his one small daughter held on to him and when she was torn away from him, one of her little nails scratched his face. The wound festered and left a scar.

In this way the grandson learns how the grandfather lost his whole family in the War. This is a part of his grandfather's life he has never known anything about. The grandfather's first wife and two little daughters had died in a concentration camp. When he returned from exile after the War, he had endless trouble trying to find out what had happened to them, where and in what circumstances they had perished and where their graves were. Later he remarried and had a good marriage with his second wife, the mother of the daughter with whom he comes to stay, but when he eventually lies dying, it is the first wife and children who occupy his thoughts.

The smallest scar thus bears witness to the most grievous wound. The fact that he can not immediately remember the cause of the scar is a classic example of repression, when unendurable grief is pushed down into the subconscious mind, but without being aware of it, the subconscious trauma has determined his view of life. The old man is marked by his life, by his history, by his past and by the stories behind the scars. The scars are the traces of the stories of his life, and his face and body can be seen as a text which represents the archaeology of his life.

Yet, in spite of understanding all this, in spite of all the sympathy and understanding for the old man, his son-in-law re-iterates his concern when the old man dies: '[t]hat was his grievous wound. In actual fact he's only *saying I am going a long way/With these thou seest*.... But it will take generations before the horrifying wails coming from the wounds of this land will die away in the mere of time. The leprosy of unreality saw to that' (10). It seems that this unreality has to do with the inability of people to see what is really happening around them — as if they were suffering from leprosy — as well as with the suggestion that they are living in a society and within a system which is suffering from a mutilating illness. The father foresees that the effects of this sickness which affects the systems of society as well as the people themselves will last for a long time.

MEMORY

'Our Mouth' depicts with compassion the lifelong effects of emotional and psychological wounds. It also indicates how dangerous it is to remain a prisoner of the past. People who are preoccupied with the grief of the past see everything through the filters of their suffering which render them incapable of playing a meaningful role in the present.

While looking at his mouth in the mirror the grandson sees his grandfather and hears his father. He knows that his present and his future are determined not only by the grandfather's wound, but also by the wounds inflicted in his own time. These wounds are of such a grave nature that the community responsible for inflicting them has also been harmed. He recognises that he is part of this traumatised community — he is one of those human creatures who are disfigured with the leprosy of unreality. He also knows that the consequences of the wounds for which this community is responsible will take a long time to heal and that generations to come will suffer on account of these 'wounds'.

In an article entitled, 'The Misuse of Memory', Tzvetan Todorov discusses this issue at length. He starts by saying that political regimes of the twentieth century have realised that they can gain control of people by dictating to the collective and individual memory. By erasing individual memory and manipulating information, those in positions of power and their governments can exercise control over communities. Therefore individuals should watch over their memories and cherish them. Inevitably, every change of government brings about a rewriting of history within another value system, but the individual's right to his/her personal history is a safeguard against potential manipulation and, according to Todorov, the strongest anti-totalitarian gesture possible.

However, memory can become a crippling force if it is allowed to grow to uncontrolled proportions. It is therefore essential to introduce an aspect of comparison in evaluating memory: suffering is never exclusive, neither is any specific form of suffering the ultimate manifestation of inflicted grief. Although every instance of suffering is significant, it should not exclude or diminish sensitivity for other incidents of suffering. If people regard their own memories as sacred and untouchable, and consider their suffering as superior to other forms of grief, memory loses its potential to signify the identity of an individual in a meaningful way. It seems to me that Todorov suggests that when memories or ideas are used in a collective ideological agenda, they become fixed, rigid and reductive. The individual memories are then absorbed into the collective construction and this not only deprives the individual of his individuality but also of the subtle variety of meanings his personal memories might have for himself. Todorov refers to events in Nazi Germany and to the Stalinist era in Russia to illustrate that memories can become part of a master narrative which can deprive the individual of his personal memory of grief.

It becomes even worse when specific incidents of suffering are institutionalised to become instrumental in demands for monetary restitution and gain. Todorov warns against the phenomenon that within a sphere of sanctified memories, people regard themselves as super victims and they are so enamoured of their own special memories of suffering that they cannot take up their responsibilities in the present.

Against the collective use of memory which distorts and manipulates to gain some form of power, stands the individual memory. Individual identity grows from individual memory in a particularised manner, but this implies that grief has to be endured, worked through and overcome individually. Nobody, and especially no official institution or body can overcome the harm done by suffering on behalf of another. That is something that every person must strive to accomplish for him/herself. As Todorov wisely points out, a person should even be allowed to forget the intolerable if that is the only way to go on living.

In 'Our Mouth' many of these issues are addressed but though the story indeed uncompromisingly indicates the mistakes and refers to the outrages of the past, it never loses its compassion. The grandfather does indeed look back, but is also

toughened by the experiences and suffering of his lifetime. His personal sincerity and integrity remain intact in spite of his shortcomings and mistakes. Though his vision of reality is irrevocably influenced and marked by what he has suffered, he is not a hard man, nor is he a bad man. He even makes excuses to his daughter and assures her that though he feels the presence of his first wife and her children, he also loved the second wife and her children dearly. In this way the story indicates that no person is completely bad or absolutely good — people make mistakes, they are unable to do what is required of them by history, but this does not disqualify them from being loved by other people. What cannot be escaped is that all people are inscribed by history, they are marked by the times in which they live.

CONCLUSION

There is another side to the interpretation of this story which concerns its reflection on the contemporary South African situation. There is now another group of victims, and there are those who feel guilty about the wounds which were inflicted by their community. The man shaving his face sees his grandfather's mouth in the mirror and he also sees it as a wound. The mouth which speaks, can also cry and wail. In Afrikaans the words *mouth* and *wound* are *mond* en *wond* and the assonance linking the words, emphasises the metaphoric connection suggested in the story. The grandfather tells his stories and that is his identity, the father uses literary language to voice his concerns and these words and stories form part of the grandson's identity, but the wounds inflicted in his lifespan are also part of his identity and with his community he carries the scars of guilt. In the final sentence the story implies that the mouth has become a wound, a wound which is associated with the 'grave marks' by which the country has been scarred. Both meanings of the word 'grave', *serious* as well as *place of burial*, are appropriate here. The wounds of the past have become like mouths which can speak and will tell their stories and their wailing will last a long time before it dies away on the mere. There is also a clear suggestion that victims as well as perpetrators are scarred by violence and that all people have to take responsibility because all people bear the marks of history. *Wounds* and *death* are key concepts in the story and because both are metaphorically linked to the mouth. The reference to the 'wound' in the closing sentence of the story not only points to the mortality of man, but also links the ending of the story to its beginning, thus completing the cycle of the argument.

Identity has to do with continuity as well as discontinuity. In Afrikaans literature many texts are written in opposition to and in negation of the traditional concepts underpinning the South African and Afrikaner identity, only suffering those links to the past grudgingly. In 'Our Mouth' there is a reconstitution of the past, there is admission of love and admiration and understanding without disavowing the guilt of the past, without evading the risks of taking responsibility for the past. The past is honoured while at the same time the guilt is acknowledged because all

wounds are relevant and have to be endured. The generation of the grandson will, however, never be able to experience the comfort of simple certainties again and they will also, as all generations, never be completely free from the past. Human lives are irrevocably changed, shaped and dominated by grievous events and the point that Du Plessis' 'Our Mouth' enforces is that the inabilities that result from being wounded lead to mistakes and new wounds. For a contemporary South African reader, the story points to the future of South Africa as well because it seems as if it is inevitable that this process will repeat itself again and again.

NOTES

- ¹ A more comprehensive account of the results of this project incorporating approximately 50 novels was presented in two papers at the conference of the *International Comparative Literature Association* which was held in Pretoria, South Africa, (August, 13–19, 2000): 'Narrative Regeneration' and 'Narrating the periphery'. Other articles based on the project, are the following: Heilna du Plooy, 'Met die verlede die toekoms in: vroueskrywers van die negentigerjare in Afrikaans' ('Taking the Past into the Future: Women Writers of the Nineties in Afrikaans'), 'An Overview of Afrikaans Narrative Texts — 1990–2000', 'New Voices Rewriting the Community — Dialogic History in South Africa'.
- ² The original text of the story was published in Afrikaans in a newly written collection of short stories on the Anglo-Boer War: P.G. du Plessis, 'Ons mond', in *Boereoorlogstories*. The text used for this paper was translated by the author himself. All references to page numbers in the article refer to this story.
- ³ See Dina Van Pletsen, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*, pp. 23–42.
- ⁴ See H.P. van Coller, 'Die Afrikaanse plaasroman as ideologiese refleksie van die politieke en sosiale werklikheid in Suid-Afrika' ('The Political and Social Reality in South Africa as reflected in the Genre of the Farm Novel'); 'Tussen nostalgie en parodie: die Afrikaanse prosa in die jare negentig', Deel I en Deel II ('Between nostalgia and parody: Afrikaans fiction of the nineties', Parts I and II); J.P. Smuts, 'Die prosa van tagtig: oorsig en tendens' ('Prose Fiction in the Eighties: Overview and Trends').
- ⁵ André P. Brink, 'Die duisend-en-tweede dag' ('The one thousand and second day'), Potchefstroom, September 13, 1999.
- ⁶ Publishers are careful not to appear politically incorrect by publishing too many Afrikaans books or even too many literary books. The emphasis is more on the development and publishing of work from previously disadvantaged communities. People mostly agree with this approach to rectify the imbalances of the past but it does mean that literature, especially Afrikaans literature, and particularly that written by new or unknown authors, does not get published very readily. There are currently many debates in the media and on the internet about this situation.
- ⁷ J.P. Smuts, 'Die nuwe herinneringsliteratuur in Afrikaans' ('New Literature of Remembrance in Afrikaans'); H.P. van Coller, 'Die waarheidskommissie in die Afrikaanse letterkunde' ('The Truth Commission in Afrikaans Literature').
- ⁸ Postmodernist thought redefines the status of history and of historiography. The validity or 'truth' of historical data or information, even when presented with documentary evidence, is questioned not only on account of the linguistic nature of historical

reportage, which is regarded as unstable and open-ended, but also on account of the inevitably subjective nature of interpretations of historical 'facts' in historiographical texts. Postmodernist literature is consequently intensely conscious of and suspicious of master narratives which inform and shape historical reports because these texts always bear witness to the ideological and philosophical views held by historiographers. See Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. Postmodernism also problematises the relation between history and narrative literature. It is assumed that the representation of reality in historiography is to an extent fictitious and not fundamentally distinguishable from literature because it uses language which is undeniably subjective and deconstructable, but also because a narrative structure is superimposed on sets of information which do not always fit the neat categories of logic, chronology and causality. Where historical accounts of the past can be biased and unreliable, 'fictitious' literature can be 'true' when it succeeds in representing a specific flavour or essence of a period or an experience in a convincing manner. See David Carr, 'Getting the Story Straight: Narrative and Historical Knowledge', in *Historiography between Modernism and Postmodernism*, p. 119.

⁹ This classification was discussed more comprehensively in the following (unpublished) paper: Heilna du Plooy, 'Narrative Regeneration', Conference of the *International Comparative Literature Association*, Unisa (Pretoria, 13–19 August 2000).

¹⁰ Further references to the War given as ABW.

¹¹ General Jan Smuts was one of the heroes of the Anglo-Boer War, but after 1910 he became convinced that the Afrikaners should give up their ideals of cultural and political independence and become part of the British empire in the full sense of the word. Smuts was Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919–1923 and again from 1939–1948. Though he was regarded as a very capable and even brilliant leader, many Afrikaners were bitterly disappointed in him because of his loyalty to Britain at the expense of his own people.

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GINA WISKER

Redefining an African Sky: South African Women's Writing Post-Apartheid

Writers and artists know better than anyone else what it is like to live and talk and shout and scream, knowing that there is no-one there listening. That makes a killing silence. What validates the experience of an artist is knowing that somewhere out there someone will acknowledge and share your deepest thoughts, your joys, your pains and your joys. Yet in South Africa we have lived for a very long time in the stifling isolation of our separate worlds both as individuals and groups. Only now do we as South African writers and artists self-consciously group and reach out to find fellow South African kindred spirits. (Lauretta Ngcobo 1994, 1)

The destructive silencing of apartheid denied expression, development, clarification and sharing of ideas and arguments about identity, location and values. Newly licensed to speak following the collapse of apartheid, many South African women work and write together, participating, for example, in the *Like a House on Fire* collection (1994), or individually, exploring and newly expressing their own versions of their lives, and their new sense of identity. Identity and location are issues that much of their work has in common, some, returning (either bodily or in their imaginations) to the locations they left. Where once these women were stifled by apartheid's censorship of thought, behaviour and expression, they now feel free to re-imagine and re-possess the locations of their past, reinscribing them with their own interpretations and values (see Farida Karodia, *Against an African Sky*, 1995). They re-member the shared past and re-vision a new future through a variety of forms, favourite among which are life writing and semi-fictional autobiography (*Basali*, 1995; *Like a House on Fire*, 1994). Lauretta Ngcobo talks of sisterhood and writing influenced by the 'shining beacon' of Olive Schreiner's comments on women's roles and challenges. Like Ngcobo, many South African women are now establishing a sense of a writing history which is vital in the creative pursuit of expressing a new South Africa that will encourage all its members to speak.

Unity across barriers of race and class is a feature of Farida Karodia's short stories, stories in *Basali*! and the variety of writing in the COSAW collection, *Like a House on Fire* (1994). Many of the women writers published in the COSAW

collection address troubled histories and endeavour to locate themselves in the new South Africa. Under apartheid, Black women writers, among them Lauretta Ngcobo, Zoë Wicomb and Bessie Head (who wrote from Botswana), were silenced unless they published outside the country, while white Afrikaaner and British-descended women writers also found it nearly impossible to express their solidarity. Recalling exile and deceit, Baleka Kgositsile comments on the loss of her countryman in 'The hill on 8.7.81'. Those 'Guilty Others', those with power, carry on or leave the country, untarnished, unpunished:

We know though
of those whose fangs
Dripping with the blood
Of our children
stick out behind
European passports
We know their stench (ll. 15–21)

Yet leaving does not clean the slate, although it can protect the innocent and guilty alike. Kgositsile uses vampire imagery to indict the murderous escapees whose European status removes all traces of their crimes on the land and peoples they left behind.

Some of the work we can now read was unpublished during apartheid, while other works discussed in this essay have been written since it ended. In some respects, the publication and discussion of the words of African women themselves about their own lives avoids potential feminist cultural imperialism, seen most often in the appropriation of Black women's words by white feminist critics. Suggesting that Black women's theory has often been a call to action, Awa Thiam comments: 'What is the use of writing about Black women, if in doing so we do not learn what they are in reality? It is up to these women themselves to set the record straight' (14).

Additional to the popular genres of life-writing, semi-fictional autobiography and testimony, a move into modes of fantasy is seen by many women as a useful way to shape and articulate both the imaginative and the everyday factual appreciation of life. With this in mind, it is important to look at the range of writing from women published post-apartheid, and it is equally important when dealing with South Africa to recognise that this is a multi-racial country with Xhosa, Zulu, Bushmen, Afrikaaner, British-descended, Asian-descended people. South African women write and speak from many cultural backgrounds, both from their own homes in South Africa and from the diaspora. This essay will concern itself with the spectrum of South African women's writing published post-apartheid, and will take location and identity as its main focus.

SELF AND NAMING NEW: LIFE WRITING AND SEMI-FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The choice of semi-fictional autobiography or life writing is a political one. For those who have suffered dislocation and disintegration of self under the

particular history of apartheid it offers an opportunity to value and articulate personal histories and express the self as subject. However, this is a critically contested choice.

While bell hooks (1982) insists that personal narrative is the only form available to Black woman, Sara Suleri argues that when you allow the 'native' to speak and use his/her subjectivity as a basis for information, you are left with the problem of how and whether subjectivity can provide truth. Representation of lived experience relies upon realism, but does not have to be written in the first person. Rather, it can show experience in action, delineating for example, laws governing rape or women's values. Limiting critical appreciation of women's writing to testimony and realism would be an arrogant culturally imperialist act, but so too would be insisting that the use of symbolism and the poetic are indications of (preferable, advanced) sophisticated writing. Additionally, our reading expectations and strategies are complicated by the post-structuralist problematisation of claims to unique selfhood, and subject identity. This critical debate developed at the same moment as many postcolonial women writers started to speak out, claiming identity and difference.

Hierarchical gender relations between (White) men and (Black) women are reproduced in the patriarchal discourse of master texts which conspire to exclude female 'minor' forms from the (scribal, written) literary canon of South Africa. For subordinated women, making any kind of creative or critical statement is to make a stand for the recognition and value of their subject position whether individually or collectively. Tradition might have hierarchised creative forms, but women 'are now writing back', revaluing what has been marginalised, as for example in the writing of semi-fictional autobiographies. Women also script oral poetry and storytelling using dialogic forms to negotiate the kind of debates found in communities and families. As Cooper argues, 'Feminised literary forms such as letters, diaries, and the literature of romance have had the same relationship to the "Great Tradition" as marginalised oral texts: [that is, they are seen to be] beyond the pale' (Cooper 7).

Mae Gwendolen Henderson draws on Barbara Smith's (1982) work on Black feminist criticism to discuss language, and argues that perspectives of race and gender intermix in Black women's writing, overcoming problems of homogeneity — foremost of which is the repression of individual differences (of heterogeneity). Instead she proposes a model 'that seeks to account for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity' (258). She too identifies a dialogic mode as characteristic of Black women's writing, that commonly takes the form not only of a dialogue with the Other outside the self, but also an internal dialogue with several selves:

What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character reflecting not only a relationship with the 'others', but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of

black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writings is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalised Other', but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self.

(Henderson 258–59)

Using semi-fictional autobiography alongside the dramatic qualities of performance poetry and other mixed forms of fiction and polemic enables a dialogic expression of the subjects' negotiated relationship with a changing South Africa. Polyphony and dialogue exist in many postcolonial texts through which formerly-marginalised peoples speak (Boehmer 206).

Suleri maintains that Black women's writing is significant for two reasons, firstly in its use of polyphony, multivocality and plurality of voices, and secondly in its prevalent choice of intimate, private, or inspired voice. She further claims that Black women writers 'have encoded oppression as a discursive dilemma, that is, their works have consistently raised the problem of the black woman's relationship to power and discourse.' (Suleri 263)

Through their familiarity with the discourses of others, in particular those who have colonised and controlled and whose languages (English, Afrikaans in this case) are those of education and the law, Black women writers weave into their work complementary discourses that seek both to adjudicate competing claims and witness common concerns. They negotiate many positions in writing of women's relationship to oppression and to speaking out.

Westernised feminism has been indicted for its racist bias and exclusion, (see Amos and Parmar, 1997). In this context, Susheila Nasta comments on the development of Black and Asian women's 'feminism' in relation to more general struggles for racial equality:

In countries with a history of colonialism, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfilment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for liberation and nationalism. Does to be 'feminist' therefore involve a further displacement or reflect an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism? (Nasta xv)

The negotiation of forms of Black and South African feminism which avoid the homogenising limitations of Western feminism, and springs from definitions of Black feminism as developed in the work of Barbara Smith, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson and others is crucial; but South Africa also includes White women, and a range of commonalities are shared by South African women who are united against apartheid and its tainted legacy. Finding voices for this range of subjects and expressions is a task these women must undertake in the coming years.

SEMI-FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematical? ... Our

nonbeing was the condition and being of the One, the centre, the taken-for-granted ability of one small segment of the population to speak for all ... we need ... to develop an account of the world which treats our perspective not as subjugated or disrupted knowledge, but as primitive and constitutive of a different world. (Harstock 163, 171)

Semi-fictional autobiography — the form favoured by many South African women writers — is often treated by post-modernist critics as aesthetically dubious because of its assertion of a subject position. In a time when self and reality need to be recognised and expressed because the right to identity was removed during the apartheid years, the post-modern project is clearly out of place. As Andre Brink puts it, it is too artificial, too controlled and finally too conservative (18). However, semi-fictional autobiography has a long history and a role to play in re-empowering hitherto silenced peoples — working classes, women, Black and Asian and other minorities or politically disenfranchised people — to speak about their lives so that others might hear, and by speaking about their lives, clarify the structure, establish the shape, value and worth of these lives for themselves. The combination of testimony and creativity enable the writer to reflect upon and structure autobiographical material. Virginia Woolf, in publishing the life writing of the Women's Co-operative Guild, carried out the same kind of enabling function — empowering the women to value their lives through their writing — as did Bessie Head with the publication of *A Question of Power* in 1974.

Autobiography is a form of creative testimony and in the hands of South African women writers it enables not only the articulation of individual identity, but the expression of the identity and experiences of a people or a community for whom the individual speaks. As such, then, it is aligned with the strategies and aims of oral literature — a form with which women for whom literary skills or even literacy were inaccessible (or even inappropriate), were not only familiar, but often skilled. South African women recuperate versions of their past lives through the explorations and expressions of autobiography:

Telling our stories, using the 'self as subject', shows the intersection between the individual and the larger forces of our history. In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally. We each have a story to tell, in its uniqueness and commonalty, but also in its constructedness. In remembering in the present, we begin to realise that parts of our past are waiting to be reclaimed, re-visited and told as we view the past through the lens of the present, weaving an inter-textual narrative. (Govinden 171)

Women writers in post-apartheid South Africa testify to a history of suffering and silencing, forming versions of a lived, shared history that can be communicated effectively to others. The autobiographical project for both groups of women writers, Black and White, enables recognition and expression of self and community in history — a reinscribing of women's lives into the location from which they spring. Hitherto this silence imposed largely by apartheid, historically

erased them, at least in terms of recognition by a wider audience. Autobiography reclaims voice and empowers the writer because it offers a viable 'truth telling' alternative to the possibility of misrepresentation by the discourses of colonial power.

For the COSAW and Lesotho writing groups (*Like a House on Fire*, 1994; *Basali*, 1995) forms of autobiography provide particularly authentic first-person testimony of history and experiences otherwise rendered second-hand through different written versions, including journalism. Similar to early African American slave narratives, testifying to one's experience has always had strength and authenticity for Black communities. For both Black and White South African women writers, an authentic voice emerges that is allied with the need to frame, control and make sense of experience rather than merely to record it. The use of various autobiographical forms also allows the construction of an 'I' figure — a fictionalised version of the self. Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb, Ellen Kuzwayo, Gillian Slovo and other COSAW and Lesotho women writers produce semi-fictional autobiographies that are both authentic *and* constructed because they interpret 'the self'. They represent the self within its community. Cultural contexts affect, condition, prevent and encourage forms of reading and writing. Post-apartheid South Africa is in the exciting, challenging, often contradictory process of re-inventing itself. In this changing context, women's semi-fictional autobiographies act as dialogues between an oppressive and silencing present and a resisting, culturally generated, self-creating individual voice.

South African women writers express the wish to reconstruct, and represent the self in the face of silencing social, political and textual colonial master narratives. Lauretta Ngcobo comments:

It is not the raw truth, the raw events of our embittered days of violence. Essentially writing is about the truth contemplated through the crucible of the imagination, and therefore truth becomes art. (Ngcobo 1994, 2)

Women in the COSAW collection build on the work of novelists such as Ellen Kuzwayo (*Call Me Woman*, 1988) writing both as the individual 'I' and as members of the collective community 'we' of Kuzwayo's autobiography. Bessie Head observes:

[it] puts aside the rhinoceros hide, to reveal a people with a delicate nervous balance like everyone else ... one feels as if a shadow history of South Africa has been written; there is a sense of triumph, of hope in this achievement and that one has read the true history of the land, a history that vibrates with human compassion and goodness.

(Head, 1990, 89)

The record of the lives of both Kuzwayo and Head are testaments of suffering, and hope.

Lauretta Ngcobo, Ellen Kuzwayo and others creatively utilise and subvert master narratives which would seek to subjugate their experience and prevent the expression of 'desires, on the one hand, and political demands, decisions and

discourses on the other' (Driver 51). In this respect, Zoë Wicomb is seen as re-valuing women's roles and reclaiming her version of language from the coloniser who would sanitise it of local references:

Her writing bears witness to a history of deprivation, yet it also suggests ways which subvert this history: not through political or economic change but through a psychological change whose major route is in re-writing representation. (Driver 45)

Apartheid's deliberate repression of the hopes, quality of human life, and ability to read and express experiences of and feelings about lives restricted the opportunity of writers. T.T. Moyana argues that its totalitarian laws were 'legislating literature out of existence':

An additional difficulty for the creative artist in South Africa, especially the black writer, is that life itself is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination. (Moyana 95)

Writing within a culture of oppression, with little leisure time, little education, much poverty and no access to the networks that facilitate publication, South African women have found it a particularly uphill struggle to express themselves and be heard.

UNDER APARTHEID: EXILE, SILENCE AND THE DIASPORA

During the years of apartheid, if writers (both male and female) wished to write, inevitably, about racism, they were banned, or could only do so from a position of exile, like Noni Jabavu, the first modern writer of South African women's novels. Despite the debilitating effects of apartheid, women continued to write at home or abroad. In the face of banning and exile, Amelia House left South Africa for England and Bessie Head was a stateless person for years in Botswana. Others remained behind but had their work curtailed. Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1988) illustrates how Black people have survived with fortitude. Winnie Mandela who was forced to live under house-arrest, dictated her autobiography, *Part of My Soul Went With Him*, over the phone to her publisher in 1985. Miriam Makeba related her story to James Hall. Nadine Gordimer's essays, novels and short stories provided windows into some versions of the lived political situation.

Although the political and critical arguments of Elleke Boehmer and others suggest that autobiographical forms are more appropriate in times of such oppression, clearly women did not confine their writing to autobiographical forms exclusively. Miriam Tlali, who remained in South Africa but was prevented from entering the library where her book was housed because she was Black, published *Muriel at the Metropolitan* in 1975, *Amandla, a Novel* in 1980, and *Soweto Stories* in 1989. Lauretta Ngcobo's 1981 novel, *Cross of Gold*, portrays guerrilla struggles across South Africa. It was written in exile (she left for London in 1966) and was banned in South Africa. Farida Karodia, writing from Canada, in *Daughters of the Twilight* (1986) and *Coming Home and Other Stories* (1988), reflects the

problems of ethnic groups in South Africa. Zoë Wicomb, who spent years in Britain, and now lives in Scotland, published her fictional autobiographical short story sequence/ novel, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* in 1987. Jayapraga Reddy produced *On the Fringe of Dream-Time and Other Stories* (1987) and Agnes Sam published *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989), whilst Sheila Fugard writes as she moves between New York and South Africa.

Apartheid literally separated — divided to rule — the different racial groups comprising South Africa, and separated the experiences and writing of groups and individuals from both the wider world, and those at home. Although women were writing at home and in exile or in the diaspora, their work was not available to South African readers. Not only writing but also reading freedoms were denied — South African writing, particularly that by women, was absent from their own, (and our own) classrooms. Betty Govinden, in writing of her apartheid education, talks of a two kinds of reading. While the radical journal, *Drum*, was read at home, it never appeared in official reading. First under colonialism, then apartheid, Indigenous writing was discredited and/or unavailable. Apposite to this deprived reality, Govinden asks:

Can it be true that black women writers were writing since the turn of the century, yet they never made their way into my classrooms in this town on the north coast of Kwazulu-Natal. Even Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), though presented to me as an exemplary model of 'indigenous' writing, was not depicted for its singular South African perspective, nor for its place in feminist thinking at a time when the world was moving into the second wave of feminist thinking and writing.

(Govinden 174)

Writing that reflected her own experience was absent: 'this daily history was slighted by a politics of selection working invisibly on behalf of my colonised self' (Govinden 175). Further to this political observation Govinden comments, 'In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally' (174).

Carol Lett participates in this telling. Her story, 'Transitions' (1994), responds to the horror of apartheid by intermixing memories of her grandfather and great-grandfather, whose violent deaths remained a rumour to her. Dates and events in her own life mark responses to the condition of living under apartheid in that selected, significant personal memories parallel South Africa's development in the post-apartheid era. Factual events are interpreted both personally and in a symbolic manner. The female protagonist was born 'in December 1959, a few months before the horror of Sharpeville, when a number of people, including children, were shot dead by police' (3). A period of protest at the Pass Laws gives way to a celebratory parallel: the birth of her daughter 'in June 1990, a few months after the long-awaited release of Nelson Mandela' (3). Her story is seen in parallel to significant historical events.

Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge note of Elleke Boehmer's discussion (1995) of the pertinence of autobiography to South Africa, that:

The unbearable reality of the apartheid world, she suggests, resists the novelistic imagination. There are some periods, it would seem, in which the task of imagining difference — temporally speaking and with regard to the other — is less possible than at other times. (8)

It is important that we recognise in South African writing the ability to record detail and document, and still suggest that life could be other; thus harnessing both the realistic detail and the creative imaginative leap, which posits another world. In post-apartheid writing South African women are recreating visions and versions of a new present and a new future while trying to shape the past into something manageable.

The full continuum of documentary, autobiography & fiction in *Like a House on Fire* includes an interview with Gillian Slovo who wrote *Ties of Blood* (1990) after the assassination of her anti-apartheid political activist mother, Ruth First. *Ties of Blood* has a semi-autobiographical focus on Jewish families which parallels the history of South African political struggles. It deals particularly with Slovo's parents' generation. Although she constantly denied its autobiographical elements, she recognises:

The people trace the historical development that my family is part of ... it is a kind of catalogue of the anti-apartheid movement in the twentieth century, and because my parents were so active in it, obviously they participated in its development.

(Braude 264)

This fictional autobiography enables Slovo to deal with her Jewish history in both an imaginative and a documentary way, while recognising that memory can be highly selective.

THE POLITICISED HISTORY OF SPACE AND IDENTITY

In the work of Miriam Tlali, Bessie Head, and Zoë Wicomb, imagery enabling exploration of the ideas of identity and hope for creative change in the future recurs as that of location, of the house and home space, and of journeying. The familiarity of spaces, the accommodation of difference in a place (usually outside apartheid South Africa) which allows one to expand and be oneself is a crucial stimulus to the writer, and nurtures engaged, imaginative works.

Spaces in colonial discourse and representation are figured as dangerous, different, to be renamed and appropriated. J.M. Coetzee comments on this phenomenon in twentieth-century white South African poetry, arguing that:

In all the poetry commemorating meetings with the silence and emptiness of Africa ... it is hard not to read a certain historical will to see as silent and empty a land that has been, if not full of human figures, not empty of them either. (Coetzee 103)

The coloniser typically empties the spaces of Indigenous people in order to fill them with settler-colonisers. Imperial and colonial texts reinscribed southern

African landscapes as if they were women — dangerous, rich, fertile — to be possessed. Re-naming — an action that insists on the importance of location and identity — becomes a shared cultural project for South African women writers. It is an act of re-possession.

LOCATIONS

The pain of enforced removals and locations has terrible impact upon identity. For exiled and transient peoples, establishing or recuperating location is important. It would appear that the establishment of only temporary living spaces has a very destructive influence on all lives. Attempts to bring up families, with the dangers and deprivations of dispossession and transience, and the conflicts between values of the town and of rural village, are subjects explored and dramatised by Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, Zoë Wicomb, Gcina Mhlope, Baleka Kgositsile and others, including the writers in *Like a House on Fire*. Yet it also becomes apparent that once inhabited, even these transient living spaces become communities whose existence enables a sense of identity to develop. The creative human spirit under pressure identifies with and occupies space often unrecognised as nurturing by others.

Home is an imagined, newly real location for many of those who return from exile, are re-settled and who search current locations, re-examining them with the values of 'home'.

Tell me
Where is home
is it the hotel room
which hosts
this grand occasion
which resides
over this honour
which delivers to me
the first step
inside my country
after 5148 nights
away from home
down the thin road
of personal history
roaming
in search of home

(Kgositsile 'Where is home?' in Oliphant, 27)

'Home' could be in a 'cluster of dusty structures' surrounding the speaker's father's ageing body, where she lives with her children, or it could be her mother's grave. In this investigation of the nature and location of 'home', Baleka Kgositsile deals with confusions of remembered versions of home that are historically and

psychologically interrupted. The thoughts of the exile returning to an imagined home are as one with those of the returned political prisoner. We can all empathise.

Let home feed music
 Into the silence
 Surrounding the memory 'of the ex-prisoner'
 let home be
 an unfurling dawn
 ushering in the new day
 where my daughter
 will be seen and
 judged as a person

(Kgositsile 'where is home' in Oliphant, 42)¹

In theorising the notion of social agency, Carole Boyce-Davies takes up issues of identity and location. She challenges postmodernism's denigration of the subject position, arguing for the articulacy and self identification of migrant, visiting, travelling, wandering Black women — women living in exile in the diaspora or those who have been dispossessed of their homes. Johannes Smit (in *Alternation*, 1996) argues that she begins to suggest ways by which new voices, identities and locations of South African women writers might be recognised. His argument rests on Boyce-Davies' use of two positions: location (home and travelling locations) and identity, developed in relation to and apart from these locations. In South African women's writing these find expression in ways which negotiate with and then refuse the master narratives and discourses of the predominantly male, imperial and colonial past. This renegotiation is a recognition that the 'radical Black [female] diasporic subjectivity' or agency is always in process (hooks 15–22) Smit notes (202). 'As "elsewheres denote movement" Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so re-claims as it re-asserts' (quoting Boyce-Davies 37). He goes on to point out that in her work, Boyce-Davies asserts that in the context of pessimism and the inability to name which accompanies postmodernism, 'Black women not only name oppressions but also find voices in the "elsewhere" of rearticulated worlds' operating on the same impulses as "maroon societies," "slave rebellions", "underground railroads"' (Boyce-Davies 107–108, qtd in Smit 1996). Smit identifies an "uprising" consciousness' (202) which 'moves us out of postcoloniality and the state of "postness" or "afterness" and into a more radical consciousness of our creativity' (Boyce-Davies 110). Creativity appears in women's performance, photography, film, art and resistance. Women, in Boyce-Davies' analysis, establish locations outside White male imperial or colonial paradigms and set up 'different spaces' — sites in which they can develop and articulate their work, identities, versions of locations and positions, so undercutting and usurping 'master discourses' (Boyce-Davies 122).

Writing which focuses on returning to, rememorying, redefining, revisiting home and the self, is produced by those who continued to reside in South Africa

during and after apartheid and those who lived in exile, returning, when it ended, either in person or in their imaginations. Re-imagining and redefining a sense of self is bound up with re-imagining and redefining locations, both historical and geographical. This imaginative, recuperative project is exemplified in the writing of Farida Karodia.

FARIDA KARODIA — AGAINST AN AFRICAN SKY

Lately the death of Tant Hester had brought home to me how much I was a product of my environment, and how neatly the external landscape fitted over the contours of the internal one.

(Karodia 30)

Farida Karodia's collection of short stories *Against an African Sky*, explores identity, return, race and gender issues. In the first title story of the collection, she takes the narrative point of view of Johan, a white Afrikaaner returning to the land his father established and settled: Padsonderend — the end of the road. The functions of the return and the tale are to settle his own conscience and move on to restitution, re-writing of histories and re-establishing a new version of his homeland for the future. Johan's story, set in post-apartheid South Africa, is a reflection of the years of apartheid and those immediately following it. It considers relationships between three people, a Black woman, Sissie, a Black man, Aaron, and Johan, an Afrikaaner. Sissie, given up by her family, educated despite her race and colour, develops her potential by becoming a doctor, so demonstrating the possibilities of Black African ability if/when given the opportunity. Johan, the landowner, gains insights into his background as the issues and politics of race in practice are crystallised following the death of his family in a car crash. Guilt over the crash elides with that derived from being a member of a privileged oppressive group. Johan discovers that his roots and relationships are more complex than imagined when Aaron, the older man, turns out to be his half brother.

Many White land owners had sexual relationships with Black women, but because of the race laws under apartheid, their mixed race children could neither acknowledge their origins nor claim any of their owed birthright, that is, education, status and inheritance:

'It's been done all over the country. White men have slept with black women since the first explorers arrived on these shores and have denied their offspring. What Willem Venter did was not unusual,' she said matter-of-factly. (17)

Aaron is a political figure. In becoming a member of the ANC, Aaron is instrumental in bringing about the new South Africa. He also places himself in a vulnerable position with regard to the police and laws of the time. Following Johan's prison visit to him after he is caught forging a false passport, Aaron chooses escape, but life on the run, matched with political success takes its toll on his health and when the men meet up it is clear that Aaron, like Johan, has returned to set his life and relationships in order.

The story offers a debate between realism and hope, idealism and the limitations of political and human relationships. It suggests that despite political idealism, few power relations seem actually to have changed in post-apartheid South Africa:

The whites had returned to their complacency, secure in the knowledge that they are still the dominant group. Now that the election is over, life has ostensibly returned to normal. I have still to take the measure of this state of 'normality'.

The rules have changed, but the game goes on as before. The election was merely a hiccup. The violence, which is confined mainly to the townships, is ignored by the white population, as long as it remains black-on-black violence. In my conversation with someone the other day, the person said: 'Who cares if a bunch of taxi drivers bump each other off?' (3)

Black Africans now buy up big houses, but everyday racism still lingers on:

It's the first thing that whites do. They separate the eating utensils as though blackness suggests contamination or infection. It's only skin colour dammit! Thank God, people are changing their attitudes. It's very slow, but eventually they'll get used to the idea that at a restaurant there are not separate cups and spoons for us. We all have to eat out of the same dishes.(39)

Upon Aaron's death, Johan recognises in his son the true inheritor of the land. This realistic, straightforwardly told tale, highlights the different kinds of lifestyles and opportunities enabled or hindered by gender and race in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. It suggests that post-apartheid potential can be realised; some ethnicity barriers can be crossed. Karodia constructs an idealistic ending that unites new versions of location and identity. It would seem that for Black and White alike, there is a place under an African sky.

CONCLUSION

Creative isolation has been damaging to generations of South African readers and writers. Now South African women's work is being written and read. Many women are recuperating versions of their past lives through publishing abroad and at home, and being studied on the syllabi of their own country, and across the world. As Jayapraga Reddy comments of history in the written and oral transaction: '[o]ur writing tradition and culture can only be strongly built if we have a sense of the foundations on which we are building' (74).

South African women's semi-fictional autobiography and life-writing, fictional prose and poetry negotiate and refuse the dichotomies of nation/self, post-modern/subject, gender/race, fiction/documentary. This varied work helps negotiate the process of re-memembering and the reclamation of a silenced past that facilitates the construction and representation of versions of identity of the self in the context of community and location.

NOTES

¹ Andries Walker Oliphant's collection comprises poetry hitherto unpublished except in small magazines and mixes poetry of exile with work from different parts of the

country, from those who write of the political but do not let that negate their sense of style, and those who cover new themes set against the context of post apartheid.

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DOROTHY DRIVER

Women Writing Africa: Southern Africa as a Post-Apartheid Project

Early in 1996 a group of Southern African women came together to compile the first historical anthology of Southern African women's writing.¹ The decision was made possible partly because the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa had brought an end to the time when most feminist academics and activists preferred to focus their energies on topics and issues relating to racial rather than gender inequalities. Partly, too, South Africa's entry into democracy and the end of the armed struggle against apartheid (this had involved all Southern African countries in one way or another) meant new geopolitical identifications became possible. Primarily, however, the decision was made through the enterprise of the African-American feminist and academic, Tuzyline Allan, who motivated the New York publisher, Florence Howe of Feminist Press. They, with others on her team, envisioned a series of anthologies under the general title *Women Writing Africa*, intended to represent women's oral and literary production through the African continent. The publisher and series editors, wished the Southern African volume to be the first in the African series and had in mind as their major market the North American educational system.

To some, an anthology with an exclusive focus on women will seem dated. Moreover, even to select texts on the basis of gender — and on race, as we did to some extent — is to posit a relation between the text and its author or authors in a way that flies in the face of contemporary poststructuralist theory, if not yet poststructuralist feminist practice.² Yet in the Southern African context an anthology of women's writing is, in contrast, belated. Whereas other countries with a comparably well-established record in literary production have already devoted historical anthologies solely to women, South Africa has produced only two, and the other countries of the region none, although there have been anthologies of contemporary writing by women. Moreover, there are so far no historical anthologies linking the entire Southern African region; and, apart from a relatively recent spate of feminist revisionist texts and occasional writing on masculinity, most Southern African literary and historical accounts pay unequal attention to women and men, and exclude gender as an analytical tool, so that political and cultural agency is still generally seen as male, and male writers and performers still tend to be more widely known than women, apart from the few 'canonized' white women.³ Hence the ability of Feminist Press to interest the editors in a fundamentally feminist anthology, whatever our concomitant belief in the need for other anthologies of other marginalised writings: Southern African

women's cultural and political agency has been minimised since their voices have been insufficiently heard, their actions often sidelined, and their understandings of their own historical situations, and indeed of gender, largely ignored, and only when all this has been taken into account can Southern African political and cultural history start falling into place. We wished to destabilise the terrible truth of what was once said by writer and critic Lauretta Ngcobo — '[M]en had (and still have) the exclusive right to initiate ideas' (137) — even if we knew there would be many ways in which women's voices and women's cultural and historical contributions would have to remain insufficiently acknowledged. How to uncover, for instance, the ways in which women's ideas have directly but quite privately fed into male creativity, as Es'kia Mphahlele says of his wife Rebecca Mphahlele, who told him the story for 'The Suitcase'? (217)

As the seven editors began meeting as a group, it soon became accepted among us that in order to offer the necessary redress, our anthology should not — as some of us had initially envisaged — limit itself to literary writing, since a literary anthology would too readily repeat old dominations (white over black; South Africa over the rest of the region; the educated, literate class over those mainly dependent on word of mouth) and should for the same reason cast as wide a generic net as possible over available material. Including a range of material, and paying attention not only to formal oral production ('orature') both from the past and the present, but also to oral presentations other than those shaped for performance or intended for publication — testimonies in court cases, for instance — would more likely change the contours, it seemed to us, of Southern African literary and political history. We were keen to show women in a variety of situations especially other than the domestic, as well as to foreground political voices — individual and in groups — as well as any others which gave a significant perspective that had not yet entered academic accounts or popular awareness. We were under no illusion that the anthology would in itself produce a history of resistance to colonisation or apartheid or to what Belinda Bozzoli has called the 'patchwork quilt of patriarchies' (155) that made up the region, for Southern African women's heterogeneity obviously works across any such monologic account. Yet we wished to trace something of the complexity of responses that both individual and groupings of women make to the different situations around them — the intricate combinations of acceptance, refusal, complicity, resistance and revolt — and, concomitantly, the subtle psychological formations of 'self', the political, economic, social, and psychic positionings whereby the terms 'woman' and 'women' take on their various meanings (and help give meaning to the terms 'man' and 'men') in the different Southern African geographic, temporal and cultural contexts. We felt the need also to produce the kind of anthology that would help bring to view at least some of the historical relations between individual women's material production, their access to power, and their signifying practices, and thus facilitate a more informed approach to both literary criticism and more general cultural and historical analysis than had hitherto been possible.

Although there are some literary entries (extracts from novels, poems, short stories) it may be thought that in the documentary rather than literary focus of the anthology, to use these terms in their standard formulation, we fall into what some feminists have called the problem of gynocriticism: in which literature is taken as valuable to the extent to which it tells us about 'women's experience', where the value of the words is reduced to issues of 'authenticity', and the text is taken as a piece of anthropology or sociology rather than as a piece of writing. However, if the documents are read in a certain way, as I argue in this essay, through being placed in juxtaposition with other documents so that they invite textual interpretation, drawing attention to the fashioning of subject positions in anthropological as well as fictional texts, for instance, and accrue significance from one another in something of the way in which words in a literary text begin to form their own symbolic, they themselves take on a literary rather than documentary status.

Through a variety of procedures, the seven editors, working closely with a group of associate editors and, on many occasions, interested colleagues and friends, found and brought forward to the table hundreds of entries, from which were chosen one hundred and twenty of very varying lengths to make up roughly four hundred pages.⁴ (With introductory and other material, the volume runs to five hundred pages). We decided to arrange the anthology chronologically and thus to avoid the regional, thematic or generic organisations that sometimes tempt anthologists, which in our view would have imposed a structure on the entries we preferred them to be free from. A thematic arrangement might, for instance, have eclipsed other themes not immediately visible or significant to us, or might have gathered the women writers into one or other kind of stereotyping, which would vitiated the sense of individuality we wished our entries to retain: in local social histories, Yvonne Brink has argued, women are too readily arranged into categories of slave women, frontier women, gay women, fallen women, prostitutes. The chronological organisation of our anthology involves readers in a constant cross-border movement: geographically, generically, and even temporally, given the fact that time is not divorced from history. Readers move between the rural and the urban, the public and the private, the fictional and non-fictional, the oral and the literary, the individual and the group, in ways that underwrite the heterogeneity with which this anthology is fundamentally concerned. On the other hand, chronologies often imply teleologies of 'progress' which we were mostly, I think, keen to avoid, although it is true that there was a certain pressure on us, partly from ourselves, or aspects of ourselves, partly from the publishers' consideration of the needs of a U.S. readership, to provide a certain optimistic 'post-apartheid' tone, especially in order to counteract our movement at the volume's conclusion into a literature about HIV-AIDS. Furthermore, Southern African chronologies also inevitably recall the time-line of colonialism, and (however much one keeps in mind Fabian's comment in *Time and the Other* regarding the different temporalities of colonial histories) our chronological arrangement gave temporal

precedence to the countries that had been 'developed' first, thus threatening to reproduce the South African domination of the region that we were otherwise at pains to redress. Thus, once we had (with some disagreement, and residual qualms on the part of some of us) agreed to exclude early white colonial women writers, we were pleased to find — for our earliest entry — a song performed in 1836, and doubtless many times before, by war widows in Lesotho which appeared to pay no attention to colonial history or imagery, although the English translation from the French, itself translated from the Sesotho, uses the classical Greek term 'underworld', where 'world of the ancestors' would seem more appropriate.

'Song of the Afflicted'

Older widows:

We are left outside!

We are left to grief!

We are left to despair,

Which only makes our woes more bitter!

Would that I had wings to fly up to the sky!

Why does not a strong cord come down from the sky?

I would tie it to me, I would mount,

I would go there to live.

The new widow:

O fool that I am!

When evening comes, I open my window a little,

I listen in the silence, I look:

I imagine that he is coming back!

The dead man's fighting sister:

If women, too, went to war,

I would have gone, I would have thrown darts beside him:

My brother would not be dead:

Rather, my mother's son would have turned back half way,

He would have pretended he had hurt his foot against a stone.

All the women:

Alas! Are they really gone?

Are we abandoned indeed?

But where have they gone

That they cannot come back?

That they cannot come back to see us?

Are they really gone?

Is the underworld insatiable?

Is it never filled?

As the editor and headnote writer, Leloba Molema states, 'Song of the Afflicted' falls within the nexus of warfare rituals whose songs and poems go by the generic name of *mokorotlo*, described by Thomas Mofolo in his novel *Chaka* (1925) as songs of men, songs of war.

Particularly striking, for the purposes of this essay, is the song's performance of gender, to use Judith Butler's term: the situation of war as the generative staging of masculine warriors and feminine mourners. Also presented, and refused is the possibility of gender transgression, as the dead man's sister imagines an alternative role for her brother: 'Rather, my mother's son would have turned back half way, / He would have pretended he had hurt his foot against a stone'.

In our editorial work, our intention was not to select the best or most representative samples from all the material available nationally and internationally (both our time and our budgets were too limited for the kind of comprehensive search that might properly form a basis for such a selection) but — in opening up the archives of Southern African women's cultural and political history to different ways of understanding both the region and the women, and in allowing for the emergence of at least some of the actions and thoughts that had hitherto been obscured — we hoped, rather, to give a new foundation and direction to further primary and archival research. We were very busy indeed, apart from the anthology project, in our various lives as academics/administrators/writers, and in the early days of the project's formulation were not able to meet often enough or for long enough to develop a coherent and binding philosophy, even if a group as diverse as us had been able ideologically to do so. This meant that we worked unsystematically, even haphazardly if perhaps also intuitively, in the discovery of material. Thus, although we often thought in terms of 'representation' and 'gaps', and continually strove to re-balance as best we could the imbalances caused by the standard regional and racial dominations, we also allowed ourselves not to worry about what was clearly emerging as the impossibility among us of a stable and absolute principle of selection. Necessity is the mother of invention. It seemed that we gradually came to agree among ourselves that these somewhat ad hoc procedures were appropriate to the heterogeneity of the editorial group, and would allow the project to slip out of any overarching principle that any one of us, or small grouping of us, might otherwise have imposed. An aim was established, then, even if after the fact (as aims so often are). In some ways this procedure might seem to be a cop-out, even while it was born of necessity. Certainly there were many times when I myself continued to worry about the lacunae and contradictions in our practices of selection. Yet any of the principles we might have devised seemed more and more undesirable, in comparison with the actual selection being produced, and I think it is true to say that there were major benefits in the very unevenness of the selection process. We came up with some unexpected entries, and the overall text reveals juxtapositions and connections which were never planned and, therefore, out of which entirely new theses might emerge — the variety of relations between women and land, for instance, is a provocative one opened up by several of our entries, and the representation of women as landowners themselves, often in legal dispute, usefully contradicts the female passivity deployed in colonial metaphors of woman-as-land. Certainly in the actual editorial selection practice there were major benefits to us as editors and academics:

we were able to listen to one another's impassioned pleas for the inclusion of something or other, on the basis of a principle both absolutely necessary and just devised, and we learnt a good deal from one another as, in discussion sometimes heated and hostile, and sometimes sympathetic, we juggled one entry against another. Our grounds of selection remained contradictory to the end, although we did strive to consider geographical spread, historical continuity, linguistic coverage, cultural and historical representativeness, while trying to avoid thematic repetitiveness; as well as aiming for readability, accessibility, and at least a degree of aesthetic pleasure. Much, we knew, was being left out of the anthology, whether by irresolvable disagreement, error or design, and I am sure we all look forward eagerly to readers' alternative suggestions and, later, to the publication of other historical anthologies that give different perspectives of the cultural and political history of the region.

In the publishers' model, established through the precedent set by the two-volume anthology, *Women Writing in India*, each entry was to be introduced and contextualised in a headnote. The headnotes in the Indian volumes were entirely written by the two editors, and at one time the publishers may have envisaged that the seven Southern African editors would write the headnotes to our volume's entries, too. Indeed, as we brought possible entries forward for the others to consider, some of us were in the habit of writing informal or draft headnotes, to justify our choice. But for publication, it was important to us to commission a wider variety of voices than those we ourselves could provide. Thus the headnotes are written by a range of people (and usually only by one of us when there was a special interest, or a commissioned contribution fell through): sometimes by colleagues who had found entries for us, or from whose critical or theoretical writing we had identified possible entries; sometimes by experts commissioned by us after we had selected entries; sometimes by writers or academics to whose voices we wished to give space, including younger figures who had not yet had the opportunity to publish much or at all. One of the major advantages to our procedure (if sometimes also causing editorial nightmares) was that we received a set of vastly different headnotes, written from varying ideological positions, in varying styles and with varying agendas. Often, they were highly informed essays in brief, making original critical points, and sometimes revealing an important personal connection with the primary material. Unfortunately we often had to submit to the publishers' radical cuts (unless we were willing to do without more of our entries), and the overall effect is a flattening out of some of the headnotes' diversity and contradictoriness. The substantial introduction, too, was a group project, put together from submissions — short and long essays, paragraphs, notes and queries, irritable amendments — made by the larger group of editors and associate editors, altogether eleven of us, at various stages of the process. (It was particularly in relation to the compilation of the introduction that Feminist Press seemed most to regret choosing so many editors, and not designating an editor-in-chief, and it was in this area too that we ourselves had most difficulty as a

group.) In its final stages, the introduction was rewritten and edited for coherence and univocality, because of the demands of readability, but it too has the heterogeneous at its core.

In sum, then, the *Women Writing Africa: Southern Africa* anthology is the project of a group brought together by means of a publishers' commission rather than by prior association or by specifically shared interests. To say this is not to deny that there were some shared interests from the start, or that shared interests were forged during the process, but all that held us together, ultimately, was a desire to produce an anthology. Its finished shape is certainly something that not any one of us, or even two or three or four or five or six of us, could have devised on our own but it is also something that each one of us would, I think, privately wish to correct, taking out one or more entries and substituting others that had been accepted/discarded by the group, adding to or even reshaping the introduction and headnotes. Heterogeneity — a heterogeneity not of harmony but of conflict — is at its core. Even in its being, as Feminist Press devised, an anthology of the written and oral production only of women, it had a fraught history: although one of us wished to exclude men, or at least established, white, male academics, from contributing, the anthology does include headnotes written by men. As Zoë Wicomb has so acutely put it:

The search for a literary/cultural theory to suit the South African situation must surely take as point of departure a conflictual model of society where a variety of discourses will always render problematic the demands of our relation to others and where discursive formations admit of cracks and fissures that will not permit monolithic ideological constructs. (36)

Despite our immense gratitude for the Feminist Press initiative, which was generously enough funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations to allow contributors to be paid and local researchers to be employed, as well as facilitating workshops, plus an extended, overseas workshop, occasionally some of us worried about the imperialism of the project as a whole: Were we creating a literature for export? Were we packaging Southern Africa in a way palatable to outsiders keen to take from our countries a vision of social progress and especially inter-racial harmony that they themselves might not be experiencing at home? Were there ways (of which we could not afford to be aware) in which we were obedient to an outsiders' vision of the project rather than to our own? Embedded in the anthology as one of our major entries is a hitherto unpublished essay by Bessie Head, ironic about an anthropological gaze which, in producing an 'Africa' of others' ideologies, desires to minimise its human and political complexities. Yet Head's dependence on a foreign readership (as in the case of so many other Southern African writers, her first three novels were published in Britain and the U.S. long before they were published at home) in combination with that critique gives an appropriateness to the anthology's dependence on foreign funding and even on foreign enthusiasm (in despair at one or other problem relating to the project, we often became tired or apathetic, and had to be cajoled and threatened into action by the formidable

publisher and editor, Florence Howe). Such ambiguities must be seen as appropriate, too, to any sociology of Southern African writing, for both the editorial and economic facilitation and the consequent difficulties of patronisation and misrepresentation are symptomatic of the differentials of power/knowledge that define relations between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds.

Of course, these labels are not necessarily to be seen as ways of naming the Euro-American world versus the Southern African world but as naming 'worlds' within Southern Africa itself, with its extreme economic differentiation. As suggested above, practical difficulties relating to the kind, detail and style of information provided in the headnotes and the introduction were usually conceptualised by us as difficulties regarding the dual audience projected for the volume, given that the audience projected by Feminist Press was primarily a U.S. student population, whereas the editors preferred to envisage a Southern African student readership, including aspiring writers who might use the anthology as sources for their own work. There were also some difficulties regarding content: what would be new to a U.S. audience (we said to ourselves) would not be new to a Southern African one, for instance; or what would be readily accessible to a U.S. audience, through U.S. publication, would be less accessible — and often impossibly expensive — to a Southern African audience than are locally produced publications. However, what no local, Southern African publication can deal with satisfactorily are the very different audiences within Southern Africa too, with different needs, demands, knowledge, expectations, and ideological positions (a rift between activists and academics is but one of the defining conflicts). Our felt difficulties in discussion with Feminist Press may sometimes have been a symptom of unspoken and irresolvable difficulties as regards this extraordinarily heterogeneous Southern African world. The residual power imbalances of imperialism and colonialism — including those within the Southern African region — remain one of the continuing facts of Southern African existence, which — if postcolonial — is only so in the temporal sense.

Insofar as our anthology is an address to — rather than simply marketed for — both an audience abroad and a not-very-different audience at home (and insofar as it is, too, an address to itself as a conflictual representation), it invites its audience to take new account not only of the ways Southern African women transform neo-colonial and even postcolonial assumptions and stereotypes but also of changing configurations of gender. Much of the literature on African women is written by non-Africans, and most of the theoretical foundations on which women's studies are based emanate from studies of women in Western societies. The specificities and nuances of the Southern African situation have for too long been left out of the narratives of postcolonialism and of feminism published abroad; both feminism and postcolonialism have also been too much driven by theoretical essays written by well established academic figures, and too little by the productions of those who have experienced colonial and other oppressions and their ramifications first-hand. It is, after all, first-world academics who are given

grants to travel to Africa and to write about Africa, while third-world academics remain in the classroom, teaching — too often — elementary English. Revisionist historical accounts of gender from Southern African historians and cultural critics depend, on the whole, on micro-analysis (significantly to the argument in this essay about the need to preserve heterogeneity), and have not issued in generalised theorisations about Southern African gender configurations. In offering primary writing and orature and also critical perspectives from Southern African women from widely varying localities, temporalities, and political and cultural positions, our anthology serves to render in more nuanced ways the historical relations within and between various Southern African social groupings than can be done through those still used but tired terms 'self' and 'other', 'white' and 'black', 'oppressor' and 'oppressed', for instance, and even through the more fashionable or current abstractions whereby subjects and positions are known as 'multiply organised', 'hybrid', 'dispersed', 'ambivalent' and 'fragmentary'. While these terms are bound to be useful in many analyses of the anthology entries, their own limitations or at least their provisionality will also often be apparent, and certainly too the entries constantly demand that such terms be historically substantiated so that they are seen as specific to the situation and are not either generalised into abstraction or celebrated as liberatory in themselves. In contrast to current fashion, on the other hand, readers may sometimes feel the need to respect the felt political necessity for the 'authentic' or 'singular' or 'unified' subject. Moreover, as regards that often problematised stance in postcolonial criticism, 'speaking for', many of our entries make visible a greater variety and complexity of ways than usually conceived in which critics need to address issues of representation and accountability: for instance, it is not always the case that those with cultural power are middle class and white, as for instance examined in Zoë Wicomb's short story, 'Another Story', one of our anthology entries.

As regards both Euro-American and our own projected Southern African audiences, we wished particularly to invite new understandings of the development of a Southern African feminism. Some critics have argued that South African feminist analysis has been too much driven by white academic feminists for it to be acceptable to black academic critics and activists (see, for example, Lewis and Maqagi). The texts we have in our anthology change how we understand the history of feminism over the last eighty years or more, and they also demand attention to the enormous variety of conditions both facilitating and inhibiting women's speech and women's writing. For instance, even after political and economic independence from colonial rule, and even where material conditions considerably improved for black people after political independence, as in Botswana and Zimbabwe, patriarchal conditions continue to militate against women's writing in alarmingly basic ways, and some of our texts exist despite the prohibitions of husbands and fathers, and also sometimes mothers and sisters. On the other hand, early political essays from two Xhosa (South African) women, Charlotte Manye Maxeke and Nolwandle Jabavu, are set in a context of uxorial

support, mission-educated men and women tending to marry one another and thereby advancing both their careers. These essays, along with other anthology entries from black spokeswomen in the early to middle decades of the twentieth century, reveal a manifest if partial indebtedness to Euro-American feminism; from the mid-1970s, with the rise in Black Consciousness, such indebtedness would be disavowed, and feminism would be conflated with Eurocentricism. Many of our entries, too, give more nuanced understandings of the now standard polarity of academic versus activist.

Arguably, the heterogeneity of the anthology — that is, the set of internal conflicts woven into its composition, along with the multiplicity of perspectives, many of which contradict received opinion — will work towards creating a kind of critical self-consciousness and debate in Southern African audiences in which voices or perspectives once marginalised or repressed now surface to awareness, and in which the differences and remaining hostilities between Southern Africans consequent on our divergent economic, cultural and political locations are not obscured — as they tend to be in current sentimentalising concepts, ‘rainbow nation’ or ‘national reconciliation’, for example — but are aired in open and reciprocal discussion. To quote Julia Kristeva’s remarkable essay ‘Might Not Universality Be ... Our Own Foreignness’ in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, the diversity of the anthology might encourage Southern African readers to become ‘familiar [...] with our own ghosts’ (191).

Not surprisingly, it became evident during the anthology compilation and the composition of the introduction that the terms at the very heart of our anthology, ‘woman’ and ‘women’, meant something different to all those involved in the production of the anthology, whether to the seven of us in the central editorial group, or to those in the larger working group that included associate editors, series editors and publisher, or to the larger community of writers involved, including not only the women whose words we gathered for the anthology, which range from the middle of the eighteenth century into the early twenty-first century, but also the numerous headnote writers. We knew that different readers, too, would understand the terms differently. And for me, at least, these differences came to be part of our point. As I saw it, the anthology would most usefully show an interest not just in what has after all come to be a truism in poststructuralist cultural studies — that what it is to be a ‘woman’ continually fluctuates, depending on the historical context, and on the political demands of the time; not just in the fact that gender, so crucial to the articulations of identity, social aspiration, and voice, continually changes meaning in relation to different understandings or experiences of class and race, themselves shifting categories, and to age and seniority, geographical location, religion, and so on; but also that gender is continually in process, and that the performance of gender (to return to Butler’s phrasing) depends on the actual or the projected audience, since in the illocutionary act of self-presentation the presented self varies with audience and address. This is why, for instance, it is productive to see gender not simply as oppositional (as the binary

categories of gender have it), and not simply as 'tethered to' its other (as Homi Bhabha so usefully amends the dynamic) (44), but as a category always in a process of being read or received or acted on. Gender is not just a performance nor (as Butler also says) 'a performative' but a performance and a performative both mediated by the 'other' to whom it is either explicitly or implicitly addressed, and also the 'other' who is interpellated by it.

This understanding of gender comes into focus and is given particularly interesting substantiation in our anthology through our selection of two early political petitions, a petition against residence tax signed by the Indian Women's Association (1908) and a petition against passes from the Native and Coloured Women of the Orange Free State (1912), signed by 5,000 women. In political petitions, women do not speak from a pre-existing position but stage themselves as a category or group, formulated for a particular purpose in a specific historical moment. Political petitions (along with charters) are thus an important genre in the anthology, not least because — showing women grouped in political action — they show that in the moment of political petition the question of what it means to *be* a woman comes to be deeply tied (in a way that Freud did not contemplate) to the question about what women *want*. With this kind of focus (one which is offered in our anthology also through court testimonies, although there the focus is on the individual), what women want can less readily be addressed simply to the issue of sexual desire, itself too readily founded on the definition of women through the phallogentric category of sexual difference. While the representation of sexual desire is by no means left out of our selected anthology entries, which thus allow for the momentary or occasional conflation of women with their bodies, such entries are contextualised through the anthology's recognition that political desires — which is to say, human desires — are also constitutive of women, and indeed of 'woman'.

Nonetheless, in the petitions' address, the category of (racialised) sexual difference inevitably plays a part. The 1912 Petition of the Native and Coloured Women of the Province of the Orange Free State asks for the repeal of an 1893 Pass Law. African men over the age of 16 were already carrying passes, and the petition against the extension of these passes to women was couched in a language that both worked in terms of, and rejected, current understandings of femininity. Inhibiting women's movements had the intention, in the words of the petition, of making 'the native and coloured women in the Province of the Orange Free State ever feel their inferiority'. The signatories also objected (or, it was objected in their name) to the fact that women wanting to remain in urban areas were allowed to do so only if they took up paid domestic labour, while also noting that the police examination of passes put them at risk of being harassed and raped, their homes ransacked and their families separated. While the conventional association between women and the home is confirmed (passes for men were not rejected on the basis of family values), the gendered subordination of women — riven here with racial subordination — is rejected, through the references to women's

confinement to domestic work, and their physical vulnerability to policemen. Since it stands at a moment of historical transition between colonial discourse and the discourse of universal human rights, the petition is discursively contradictory as regards, also, the relation between women and the law. In order to provide a contrast with the kind of law that produces pass laws, the petition describes 'just, progressive and protective law' as law that would be responsible for women's 'elevation in the scale of civilisation' while it also abandons the tones of colonial discourse for a more modern, economic discourse of human rights, in which just law for women is defined as that which would 'improve their social status'.

In the 1908 Petition of the Indian Women's Association (an association of women who had themselves immigrated or were descended from immigrants from India), again, the context is one in which a larger group, women and men, are discriminated against. The tax, a residence licence, was directed at indentured Indians who had completed their contracts with their employers, and were not being re-indentured or returning to India; it was a means of enforcing either repatriation or prolonged indentured labour. Although the petition complains that the sum is too high for Indians, 'irrespective of sex [...] owing to their helpless and indigent state', the petition focuses exclusively on women, 'weak and gentle' by nature, who wish 'to ameliorate and elevate the condition of their sex' by avoiding this taxation. As in the 1912 Petition, femininity is also defined partly through the risks of 'domestic infelicity'. Moreover, more strikingly, and differently, it is said to be 'with great shame and sorrow' that the Indian Women's Association makes the following social threat: women in default of payment would be tempted 'to barter their female modesty and virtue' in order to avoid the horror of going to court. Such a threat plays both on sexual and racial difference, and has considerable force in a context of the official forging of a white nation, and of white women's anxieties about their white husbands straying into the arms of 'exotic' women. Southern African history often focuses on what was commonly known as the 'black peril'; our anthology shows the 'peril' to be decidedly white, although here, of course, the reversal is a gender reversal, rather than one of race, as the Indian women mockingly inhabit the position of the perilous black.

What it means to be a woman is proposed, in these petitions, in a highly specific, contingent and provisional way by the signatories, and then somewhat differently by the headnote writers in a way that extends our understanding of gender as a performative act. This is to say that petitions are constitutive of more women than the 'women' who sign them. Interestingly, both headnote writers, Devarakshanam Govinden regarding the 1908 petition, and Rirhandzu Magweza regarding the 1912 petition, draw connections between the political moment under respective discussion and the later mobilisation of black women in 1956, from which so many Southern African women take at least an aspect of their self-image. Says Govinden: 'In 1952, when Africans and Indians organised the fourth Passive Resistance Campaign, a Multiracial Conference of Women was held in

Johannesburg. This culminated in the historic march by South African women of all race groups on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, on August 9, 1956'. Magweza writes: 'On 9 August 1956, in the same spirit as the OFS women, 20,000 women marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, singing: 'You have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock'. It is with these two groups of women that we should venture proudly into the new African century, upholding the rights our foremothers claimed for us.'

The performance of femininity inheres in its reading, which is inevitably also to a greater or lesser degree a misreading, and is, in the case of these two petitions at least, racially conflictual. A major difference between the two identifications suggested above is that, although both identify with the broader multiracial political movement of women, Magweza deploys a discourse of black motherhood consequent on the discourse of the Black Consciousness movement as she explicitly interpellates herself into the 1912 Petition rather than the 1908 Petition. Of the later petition, she says, 'the women do not grovel. Their assumption of motherhood lends them strength, authority and agency, a characteristic of black women's struggles in South Africa up into the 1990s'. For her, its primary importance lies in the fact that 'a multitude of women of different ethnicities and social backgrounds could mobilise around a single issue, and that they could do so without presenting themselves as the weaker sex'. Thus, whereas Govinden's analysis uses the performance of Indian women to project an amalgamation of women from Indian and African and other race groups, Magweza's analysis projects an absorption into the 'African' of a heterogeneous group of women in racial and class terms. They are similar, however, in that their own performance of gender responds to the performative act of the petition (which is in each case somewhat ambiguously gendered) through a reading, or misreading, that minimises the gender ambiguities and focuses on the racial configuration.

When it was decided to include women's petitions, the anthology came up against a problematic of authorship that the editors had elsewhere felt we had quite resolved. For example, we had easily if regretfully decided to exclude an early eighteenth-century court record referring to an enslaved woman, known to us simply as Trijntje of Madagascar, since we could not establish in the record her presentation of testimony through the use of the word 'I'.⁶ If the word 'I' appeared, we decided, the testimony would be hers. In these two petitions, where of course 'we' substitutes for 'I', the anthology's representation of 'women' is complicated in that both petitions were both obviously drafted at least in part by lawyers, perhaps male, and the later petition at least, with the telling use of the phrase 'their women-folk', shows evidence of male mediation. For example, Clause 3(a) reads: 'That this law is a source of grievance to your petitioners in that: — It renders them liable to interference by any policeman at any time, and in that way deprives them of that liberty enjoyed by their women-folk in other Provinces'.

The problematic of authorship, therefore, was this: the petitions may not have actually been written by the women signatories themselves; the precise wording of the petition may not have been formulated even by one of the women organisers of the petition; the formulation and the writing may have been the responsibility, rather, not simply of male lawyers acting on the women's behalf but even, as part of that process, of male lawyers imagining what would be appropriately voiced by women and thus of putting words into women's mouth. While some degree of mediation occurred in virtually all of our inclusions, and while our entire project is itself a form of mediation, the kinds of mediation either evident or simply likely in these petitions (the origins of these petitions are not for the moment traceable) throws into focus that pronoun 'we'. What, then, of our reasoning regarding the exclusion of Trijntje's reported testimony yet the inclusion of other court testimonies which, only through a different orthodoxy, included the pronoun 'I'? If the 'I' in the court record is as mediated as the word 'we' in the petition, how much difference does it make to include a court record using the word 'she'? In the petitions, although the legal language effaces any conventional signs of individual creativity, the desires of women are evident in the targeted social change, and femininity is both performed, in the sense of being staged, and is a performative, in the sense of being enacted at the moment of enunciation, in a configuration that gives it specificity as a race-gender category which is then taken up and reshaped by a younger generation. These political petitions thus invite an interrogation of the category 'woman', the relation between 'woman' and 'women', and the relation between 'women' and 'men'; correspondingly, too, they invite an interrogation of the race categories that enter their discourse or are part of their mediation, whether at the moment of composition or at the moment of reception.

Anthologies tend not to question the essentialist grounding of their categorical limits, and certainly not when these relate to gender, and since it was generally felt inappropriate to do so in our introduction we were able to shelve the problem. Nonetheless, a crucial point is being made through our anthology, by virtue of its more obviously mediated entries, and this is to do not only with the impossibility of the question of women's 'own' voices, but also with the precariousness and provisionality of the ongoing production, through the signatures and voices of multiply situated women, of what come to be known as 'Southern African women'. Just as the anthology makes the implicit point that a legal advisor might write for — or 'speak for' — a group of women whose voices we as readers now receive as their 'own', so too does it make the point that a political situation, or a cultural one, might equally decisively shape a woman's voice, and that — in that moment of shaping — a man's voice, or men's voices, or racially/ethnically 'other' voices, might be actually, if not officially, involved. Questions of hegemony continually arise to destabilise the notion of 'own' voice, yet this point remains insufficiently recognised, whether in postcolonial projects of 'speaking back' or in anthology projects like our own. Nevertheless, it remains true that the political petition signed by women — or any other text so signed — substantiates the concept 'women' in specific ways, and serves to produce for the

external world a stance recognisably 'female', creating a speaking position others are able to identify with or to measure themselves against.

If the kinds of substantiation given to the concept 'women' through the various different entries in the anthology depends not just on the specific ways the signatories place themselves — or are placed — through the linguistic gestures they make and on the political contexts that give rise to and are put in place by their stances, but also on the different shapes given them, and the different identifications they give rise to, in the very different acts of reception to which they are subject, then the performance of 'women', and the performative of gender, includes the reading that this anthology will undergo. I myself liked to think (though found no acceptable way of saying so in the introduction, and here too struggle for the words to make my meaning clear) that the title, *Women Writing Africa*, used the present participle 'Writing' to denote an ongoing process of creation which included all the women engaged in the project, as well as the readers (whether women or men, but, if men, positioning themselves provisionally and sympathetically as 'women'), and I liked also to suppose that the participle carried within it a kind of bi-directionality — 'women' write 'Africa', and 'Africa' writes 'women' — as if the participle 'writing' could hold the two concepts, 'women' and 'Africa', in a precarious, mutually dependent signification in which both terms remain open to meaning even as they are being launched on a trajectory of bounded reciprocity (the 'Africa' that women have been and are in the process of writing, and the 'women' continually being produced in that 'Africa' being written). In this regard it is possible to see in the terms 'woman' and 'Africa' something yet to be discovered, the 'woman'/'Africa' always in the process of becoming, in a way that promises to transcend the land/woman metaphor that has relegated women to passivity, and also the social, historical, and geographical divisions that have hitherto been definitive. Thus, as regards the problematically oversimplified relation between the text and its author or authors referred to earlier, this anthology arguably recognises the continuing volatility of this relation by foregrounding the ways in which the authorial positions are constantly being 'engendered' and 'raced' (rather than starting from a fixed or stable position) depending on the cultural demands and possibilities of the time. Current readings of them will re-perform them in different ways, comprehending the entries in the context of a variety of ideologies — or at least preconceptions — about gender. Different readers will inhabit, adjust, appropriate and misread these voices and their performances of identity very differently, perhaps reinfecting them with idiosyncracies that themselves await social comprehension and assimilation into the 'Africa' known and understood.

Much of the point of the anthology, then, for me, is its production of a democratic environment in which readers may freely and independently engage with each entry, assisted by a headnote but not overpowered by it, not in total command of its meanings but rather in dialogue with it. The very heterogeneity of the volume, its temporal and spatial juxtapositions and connections, its multivocality and multi-generic form, will encourage, I hope, a reading for nuance, obviating what has too easily — at least in Southern African academic life — been a reading for stereotype, in which picking out

instances of racist or sexist stereotyping substitutes for close reading. This ability to see the complexity and 'otherness' of the text is to read with respect.

Furthermore, in that this kind of reading opens up new identifications for readers, it may in itself perform some kind of change in consciousness. Acts of writing and reading create a space shared but also not shared by writer and reader: writers are not in full control of their meanings, and readers are actively engaged in creating meaning from the writing rather than being positioned as consumers of a pre-digested world. In this regard reading is an act of creative engagement, and insofar as it helps constitute both new ways of imagining oneself as an individual and new ways of imagining groups, it is a potentially transformative act. The anthology as a whole is best thought of, it seems to me, not as the retrieval of an authentic Southern African past, but as a way of forging Southern African consciousnesses (political, cultural, communal, ancestral) which take their inspiration from the voices of women. These voices are, or may be, important not because they are the voices of women (beings defined by sexual difference) but because they are voices of a heterogeneity hitherto eclipsed.

Recently, many writers and critics have been speaking of writing in relation to transformation. André Brink has argued that fiction — which he conceptualises as existing at the margin of what has happened and what can be newly conceived — is the best means of exploring possibilities of cross-cultural intercourse. South African writers, he observes, continue to feel the need, experienced so deeply during the 1970s and 1980s during the era of Black Consciousness and its particular mode of realism, to tell the 'truths' of apartheid history. However, he argues that writers need to look for a form of narration capable of acknowledging difference without fearing it and without fetishising it. Now that liberation is on its way, said Albie Sachs a year later, culture should no longer be seen as a weapon of the struggle, but should open itself to differently targeted representations; the new value of art lies in its capacity to act as a vehicle of ambiguity. As Brink's term, 'cross-cultural intercourse', and Sachs' particular examples suggest, the post-apartheid reconciliation that critics propose is specifically to do with racial reconciliation, and with the role played in reconciliation by recognising and representing the ambiguities of racial affiliation. What of gender reconciliation? While public discussions of South African social transformation are linked to race, transformations in gender relations are kept specific to gender rather than being seen as affecting society as a whole. Yet, in arguing through this anthology that women's voices need to be more closely attended to than they have been at present, an argument is being made about other social differences as well, for the issue of gender reconciliation necessarily incorporates the issue of reconciliation across race and class and other differentiating categories; in this regard gender is a category ontologically quite different both from class and from race. The argument is not that the selected texts bring to the fore in any immediate way the possibilities (or impossibilities) of reconciliation between women and men, and between women of different races and ethnicities, of different educational and economic backgrounds and statuses, and of different religious and political affiliations; for one thing, most of them are simply not about reconciliation. Instead, it is that, both by virtue of having been historically

suppressed and of representing (at their moments of speaking or writing and at their moments of being read) a multiplicity of positions that gather, precariously, under the name 'woman', they reveal those 'ghosts' without whose recognition social transformation is impossible. Conceivably, an anthology of writings by men, or by women and men, could achieve the same effect, but only if there were a comparable estrangement, where men's voices were seen to be constructed in conditions of heterogeneity, and thus to draw attention to themselves as constructions.

NOTES

- ¹ The Southern African volume will be published by Feminist Press (New York) in November 2002, and probably by a South African publisher shortly thereafter. Among the larger group of women brought together in an initial meeting by the publisher and series editor, seven of us stayed the course for the subsequent meetings, and thus the editors for the volume are: Margaret Daymond, Dorothy Driver, Sheila Meintjes, Leloba Molema, Chiedza Musengezi, Margie Orford, and Nobantu Rasebotsa. The only editor actually appointed at the early stage was Nobantu Rasebotsa, as regional co-ordinator. Although much that is said in this essay may be shared by the other editors, and — as acknowledged at specific moments — is sometimes drawn from their research, it must be stressed that this essay offers a personal view. My thanks to Margie Orford and to Meg Samuelson (editorial assistant) for useful comments on an earlier draft of this essay, and to Flinders University for affording me the time and the space to complete the essay for publication.
- ² For instance, two recent critical books by Julia V. Emberley and Gillian Whitlock written from a poststructuralist feminist perspective, both of them excellent, focus solely on women writers or almost altogether on women writers, respectively.
- ³ In English Southern African literary criticism, the 'canonised' white women writers are Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith, Nadine Gordimer, and Doris Lessing (all but Pauline Smith are represented in our anthology, and in each case by relatively unknown writing). There are also 'canonised' black women writers — for instance, Bessie Head and Tsitsi Dangaremba — who are represented in the anthology by unknown pieces, but these writers are less widely known than the white writers. For discussion of the gender blindness of much historical analysis, see Helen Bradford. Both in historical and in literary analysis, however, the picture is changing.
- ⁴ In the text that follows, I quote and cite the anthology entries (a poem, petitions, and a short story) as well as the headnotes from the manuscript of our anthology, and thus no page numbers are available. The texts of the headnotes may change somewhat in the final version, which has been cut for reasons of space.
- ⁵ Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* defines gender not as a set of free-floating attributes, but as 'performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence [...], constituting the identity it is purported to be' (24–25).
- ⁶ For information on Trijntje, see Nigel Penn.

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SIPHOKAZI KOYANA AND ROSEMARY GRAY

An Interview with Elana Bregin

Elana Bregin, recipient of the FNB Vita/English Academy Percy Fitzpatrick Prize for youth literature in 2000, was interviewed by Siphokazi Koyana and Rosemary Gray (University of Pretoria) in December 2001. This multi-talented author, freelance writer, editor and lecturer was born in Johannesburg in 1954. She completed her BA at the University of the Witwatersrand and her MA in English at the University of Natal in Durban, where she currently resides. Her dissertation topic, 'Representations of the Bushmen [San]' reveals her deep-seated and lasting concern for the plight of the people in the country of her birth, a concern which is consistently manifest in her novels to date (*The KayaBoeties* [1989], *The Red-haired Khumalo* [1994], *The Boy from the Other Side* [1992], *The Slayer of Shadows* [1998]), as well as in her stories for younger age-groups (*The Magical Bicycle*, *A School for Amos*, and 'Now We Are Free' — the latter published by Bloomsbury in a prestigious anthology entitled *Dare to be Different* (1999) commissioned by Amnesty International).



The Slayer of Shadows, for which Bregin won the FNB Vita/English Academy Award, is a darkly disturbing book which is at the same time also an imaginatively transformative text. Bregin represents a wasteland that appears at times both despairingly futuristic and mediievally superstitious, but also recognisably located in the South African present, in those forgotten places where change has not reached, and life has become a battle for survival. Her richly lyrical text skilfully combines elements of autobiography, fantasy, fable, and magical realism to present a powerful story which traces the coming of age of a young girl in the lawless Jungle.

As the questions which follow demonstrate, Elana is disarmingly honest and even harshly self-aware. Her ability to confront the 'self' without pretence and equivocation, enables her to understand and to empathise with the 'other' in a rare and inimitable manner. This is a writer who indeed dares to be different,

tackling contemporary societal issues with humour, goodwill and a sure sense of mission.

SK & RG *To what extent did the winning of the English Academy of Southern Africa's Percy Fitzpatrick Award for children's literature inject new life into your enthusiasm as a writer? Has this prize helped to rekindle your 'courage' to write.*

EB I'd better just clarify that the category that the Award was given in was youth literature, not children's. I really hate that 'children's' label, since it pigeonholes me and makes it very difficult for me to be taken seriously in other connections. I also have to stress that distinction because *The Slayer of Shadows*, with its harsh subject matter, is absolutely not suitable for juniors. Its aimed at the 'mature young adult', which is a very different category from children's. And yes, winning the Award has definitely made a difference to my inspiration (and courage) levels. Writing had, for me, become a very disheartening exercise, for all sorts of reasons, and I'd virtually given up on it. That recognition of worth that the Award implies rekindled the spark in the most amazing way. One of the problems with writing is that its such a lonely business. Unlike with acting, you seldom have access to your audience's response. Most of the time, you get no feedback at all (except when something you've said has caused negative reaction). So you tend to imagine that you're writing into a dark and empty theatre, and the question then becomes — why bother? That's why writing awards are such a vital incentive — and its such a pity that a country like ours has so few of them.

SK & RG *Your texts do not patronise the young reader by presenting any over-simple explanations of complex and violent realities; instead they provide a context for exploring the challenging issue of evil and the potential for individual and communal survival and even renewal. What makes it so easy for you to write for young adults? Do you perhaps have children of your own who keep you in tune with the goings on in the world of young adults?*

EB No, I don't have children of my own, so maybe its just a case of my own 'arrested development'! I must own that I seldom consciously set out intending to write for a particular age group. My stories tend to find their own voice, and a lot of the time, that seems to be young adult. I think the lovely thing about this category is its versatility. They are still children in many ways but also beginning to engage with the universal human themes and life dramas that we regard as 'adult', so they respond well to innovative approaches that tap into that mix of innocence, angst and maturity. I like the challenge of

broaching quite strong topics in a way that will strike chords with them — for example by using humour, adventure or fantasy.

SK & RG *Since you use a lot of humour in your writing, what have you learnt about South African humour? What makes young South Africans laugh? Is their humour unique or different from that of their peers elsewhere?*

EB I think young South Africans have a delicious sense of humour. They love slapstick humour as all children do, but they also appreciate naughty irony, the kind that subverts the 'rules' and draws attention to the inherent ridiculousness of real situations/behaviour. South African adult humour is, to me, much less interesting. Our national mascot seems to be the loveable buffoon, and our comedy is too often portrayed at the level of parody rather than wit. The most enjoyable kind of comedy is the kind that makes you laugh with recognition. I think this is universally true, and applies to both adults and young adults.

SK & RG *The quality of your writing is such that the 'unspeakable' events are described in a way that does not sensationalise nor trivialise the brutalities experienced by the child and her Shadow-slayer. Yet, you were once accused of 'indoctrinating' the innocent minds of children, and the prize-winning *The Slayer of Shadows* was regarded (by some) as too advanced for children (for example, Isn't the sexual relationship between Marinda and Zach incestuous?). Do you think that your subject matter is perhaps too 'real' or is it just that polite society prefers not to confront that reality?*

EB Yes, I do seem to have the knack of attracting controversy! The accusation of indoctrination that you mention was not something I could take seriously, since it was made by a prejudiced right-winger who objected to my irreverent treatment, in a story, of the AWB — SA's fascist right-wing armed resistance movement.

As for *Slayer of Shadows* being too advanced for children, I couldn't agree more. I must stress again that it was never intended for children, but for mature readers. And the cover blurb I think makes this clear. That aside, the question of whether young readers should be sheltered from the 'too real' realities of life is a pretty thorny one. I personally think you're not doing anybody any favours by pretending that children live in an 'innocent' world. Many of them are facing some pretty unspeakable situations in their own lives. And rather than editing these out, it's far more valuable for stories to depict them honestly and offer a model of how to cope with them better.

One of the judges of a young adult competition once pointed out that 'authors seem nervous of confronting serious issues, forgetting that children face or see the results of serious issues in their everyday lives'. This is certainly true of SA, with its terrifyingly high child rape/incest statistics, which indicate that huge numbers of 'children' have experienced these traumas for themselves. I deliberately chose not to gloss over the rape scene in *Slayer of Shadows*, because the frequency of rape in this country and the lack of trauma support means that rape is too often treated as nothing — just something boys do and girls must put up with. Without being graphic in the depiction, I wanted to look honestly at the deep psychic damage that rape does. The girl in the story takes us through the emotions that many rape victims go through, but so often can't talk about. The point of that episode is that her choice in the end is life-affirming, not hopeless or destructive.

SK & RG *To what extent do you think your harshest critics are wrestling with the dichotomy between the real and the fictional? Can this be attributed to confusing the mimetic with the diegetic mode of representation?*

EB Yes, I think that that reality/fantasy overlap is problematic for those who like their narrative in labelled boxes. Westerners are particularly category-driven. African culture seems to have a much more intuitive understanding of the overlap between the symbolic and real elements of life, and of the way in which the seen and unseen worlds, the natural and supernatural feed into each other. Which is possibly why black readers who encounter the book have responded so positively, because it gels more with their world-view. There's also something about this kind of 'real-but-not-real' writing that touches the nerve. We're fairly inured to the graphic violence in our news reports. We've learned to switch off to it to some extent. But when you dress up that reality in different clothing and take it out of its familiar setting, it somehow looks a lot more shocking.

The choice of mimetic over diegetic was an involuntary rather than intentional one. There was just no way that I could have written this story in 'real' mode. At the time of writing, we were so saturated with violence. The whole country seemed to be full of burning shacks and traumatised refugees with unspeakable stories to tell. My dilemma was, how does one make a palatable story of such literal suffering? In a world where the abnormal has become the norm, where atrocity has lost its shock value, how do you prick feeling back into the blunted nerves? How do you convey, without being banal or trite, that

incredible resilience of spirit that enables so many survivors of trauma to carry their humanity, not their monstrosity, forward into the future?

SK & RG *What was it about your own childhood background that sensitised you to the racism in your environment, and how did you deal with such racism then?*

EB I think I was quite an outsider myself, and so tended to identify naturally with the underdog rather than the in-group. As a child, I was always aware of the wrongness of the talk I heard around me and the humiliating treatment that I saw being meted out to people who were the 'wrong' colour. But it never occurred to me that there was anything I could do about it — until I went to university and got woken up to student politics. The only time I can remember being in a situation of having to physically stand up for someone was late one night when a boyfriend and I came across a small black newspaper seller being bullied by two burly white men (who I think were plainclothes policemen). I loudly shouted at them to leave him alone and sent my boyfriend (who was a Karate black belt) to intervene. At which point they released the newspaper seller and beat my boyfriend to a pulp instead. My guilt was almost as painful as his concussion. That was the last time I sent someone in to do my fighting for me.

SK & RG *Your richly lyrical text skilfully combines elements of autobiography, fantasy, fable and magical realism to present a powerful story which traces the coming of age of a young girl in a lawless jungle. One of the remarkable features of the text is the way you graphically articulate the effects of trauma as the narrative gradually fills in the past that the child is attempting to forget. What kind of research goes into writing a book such as *The Slayer of Shadows*? For example, how do you know the intimate details of ghetto life, assuming you've never lived in one?*

EB Most of the crucial research that is done for a book like *The Slayer of Shadows* happens long before I ever think of writing such a story. I never feel comfortable about barging into other people's painful lives as a 'research tourist', so I tend to write about places, people and events that I'm already familiar with and have internalised as part of my 'own' life experience. That wounding old 'inauthentic voice' charge that used to be hurled at white writers who imagined they could write about black lives without ever having been into a township was a valid challenge. But I don't believe that one can ever write convincingly about a place — real or metaphorical — that one has

not 'been into' in the fullest sense of the words — both physically and emotionally.

SK & RG *Most of your writing shows an intuitive ability to feel for and think like 'the other'. To what do you attribute this capacity to place yourself in the shoes of [an]other?*

EB I think that as a writer, as with an actor, you have to be able to put yourself in the shoes of another — more than this, to slip into their skin. The act of writing is an empathic act. Its that empathy that enables us to transcend our limited and narrow little lives and think ourselves into the lives of others. What we are drawn to write about is usually what we can strongly identify with. Research may provide the descriptive details. But empathy is the train ride that takes you into the heart of the country.

SK & RG *Has the new dispensation in SA (that is, the post-apartheid era) made story telling more or less difficult for you?*

EB Both. Easier in the sense that you have the freedom now to leave social reality behind for a while and explore a whole range of subject matter, from the trivial to the sublime, without feeling that you are turning your back on the cause. More difficult in the sense that during apartheid, you never had to wonder what you should write about, or what you were trying to achieve with your writing. Your writing had an urgency and purpose, because it was linked to larger things. The mere fact that you had a voice in a country where so many didn't, meant that you were almost obliged to use it. Now, its all reversed. The questions to be wrestled with are how relevant my white voice is in the SA of now and what of value do I, as a white South African, have to contribute to this multi-cultural moment.

It's also dismaying to realise that my whole history of experience is now out of date. For instance, the experiences that SA kids have in their multi-cultural classrooms today, and the issues that they are facing are completely different from the ones that I grew up with. So I can no longer just complacently rely on my own childhood memories for background. They are the relic of a past that is no more. There's been so much change so quickly, and because we're moving with it, we tend not to be aware of the really significant things that are happening around us. When you're living your history, you can't always get the necessary perspective to write it.

SK & RG *Do you regard The Slayer of Shadows as a post-apartheid text and, if so, why?*

EB I think it depends on your definition of post-apartheid. If you see it in terms of a time-line, then technically it qualifies. But if you mean do I see it in terms of an indictment on the system, then only indirectly. What it examines is the brutal aftermath of a brutal system. But its not just apartheid itself that's in the dock here. It's the inhumanity of the brutalised — the powerful, conscienceless scavengers who gorge themselves on the weakness and misery of others.

SK & RG *To what extent do you see The KayaBoeties as an early attempt to 'write back' on behalf of teenage girls?*

EB Not much. Because that wasn't my conscious intention when I started writing it. My primary concern in *KayaBoeties* was to show the ugliness of racism to teenagers of specifically the male variety (since they were the worst offenders) who weren't in the least interested in hearing it — unless I could be cunning and use humour to disarm them. The use of a female voice, Charlie, as the central protagonist was not a conscious decision to 'write back' in a gender sense, but more a natural development of the need to have a dissenting voice to challenge the male smugness. It was only when the story got going, that I began to relish Charlie's outspokenness more and more, and to feel I was getting my revenge for all my own long-suffering years at the receiving end of young male arrogance. So I suppose in that sense, yes, it was a 'talking back'.

I must add that re-reading the book recently, I found it a wincing experience. Pecker's blunt diatribes and his tendency to use 'those words' (as Charlie would say) are a lot more shocking and uncomfortable to encounter now, than at the time of writing, when we were so habituated to them. And I was very struck by the portrayal of Sam, the black protagonist, as the virtually voiceless victim, who needs Charlie to speak for him. It was a sobering reminder of the long road we've travelled since 1989 when the book was written.

SK & RG *Would you regard The Red-haired Khumalo as protest or prophetic or both?*

EB *Red-haired Khumalo* was not so much prophetic or protest as ironic commentary — an attempt to capture, with humour, the ironies of a particular moment that was happening around me, when the political was moving faster than individuals could keep up with. People who had been kept complete strangers to each other for decades, who were not allowed to 'mix' in any form, were suddenly expected to drop the barriers and interact on equal terms. The result was the 'I'm

all for the new SA, but not in my living room' syndrome, which is what the white girl in the story epitomises.

SK & RG *How do you go about the process of writing a book, given that you do other kinds of work, such as teaching? In other words, when do you find the time to write, or is writing your primary activity?*

EB No, alas — earning a living is my primary activity, which leaves not nearly enough energy/time over for writing. It seems to get more and more difficult, as the years whirl by, to set aside the extended blocks of time needed for getting all those words out in a flowing and continuous motion. I usually try and start new projects in the Christmas break, and then frantically work away to sketch out as much of the first draft as I can. Once the skeleton is down, it's easier to have reference points to go back to after the treadmill has claimed you again. I think the worst thing you can do to any writer, is yank them away from their PCs just when inspiration is in full flood and the story is eloquently unfolding itself. Once that continuity is broken, it can be a real battle to get back into the 'skin' of the novel again. Sometimes, if the interruption is too prolonged, you never do get back. The story is gone forever.

SK & RG *If, as you commented in your speech for the International Research Society for Children's Literature Conference in August 2001, you are like Bach, who had to try to avoid tripping over ideas that came to him, how selective do you find you have to be about the 'stories [that] leap at you from every corner'?*

EB I usually find that most of the stories that leap are just flashes in the pan. The one that is viable is the one that takes root without conscious effort, the one that writes itself in your head when you're busy doing other things, like the shopping and the driving and the dishes. I find the mechanics of writing an exhausting process, so I tend to carry my stories around for as long as possible, until I'm sure that they're worth setting down. I seldom start a book sitting formally at my word processor. The real work of writing, for me happens in the head, not the hand.

SK & RG *With the incredible richness of SA life and the stories it provokes, have you considered writing short stories instead of novels?*

EB I have written the odd short story for both local and UK anthologies. It's a genre I enjoy very much. The shorter format suits my restless attention span and is easier to fit in between other demands. But publishers tell me that short story collections are hard to sell, so I

haven't really focused on that in any serious way. Most of the writing that I do these days is very adult, and includes academic articles, journalism, travel writing, and so on.

SK & RG Which writers have had the most influence on your own writing?

EB I've always read so voraciously that it's hard to pinpoint which writers in particular helped to form my style. I've always been a big fan of the so-called science fiction/fantasy writers, like Ursula Le Guin, Frank Herbert, Tolkien, Ray Bradbury and so on. Books like *Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Silver Locusts*, *Dune*, *Lord of the Rings*, are often denigrated as escapist and therefore 'not real literature' — but in fact they are often very profound. They have such an intricate understanding of the human condition and I admire beyond words their realistic and beautiful portrayals of invented worlds to comment on our own. Closer to home, the stories of the *Drum* writers of the 1950s, like Can Themba, Henry Nxumalo, Richard Rive, Nat Nakasa and Casey Motsitsi are among my favourites. Despite their uneven technical skill, and their tragically short lifespans (most of them fell victim to violent death of one kind or another) I think they are among the most original, interesting and thought-provoking voices to emerge in this country, with an incredible talent for conjuring up the world and times they lived in. Of course our Booker prize winner, J.M. Coetzee must go on the list, as well as the much-criticised Alan Paton, who came closest of all to writing the Great South African story of his time — *Cry the Beloved Country* — the only South African book that I can think of that, with all its flaws, transcended its time and space and captured the imagination of the world.

SK & RG What do you see as the challenges facing South African writers in the new millennium?

EB To write the stories of now, that capture new millennium South Africa in all its multi-faceted complexity. No easy task. And of course, to produce the big one — The Ultimate Great South African Novel, which I don't believe has been written yet. What would it need to qualify for this title? It would need Alan Paton's storytelling skill, J.M. Coetzee's insight, Can Themba's brilliance and the readability of Harry Potter!

SK & RG What book are you working on currently and why?

EB That has to remain top secret, for fear of premature miscarriage!

SUE WILLIAMSON



Sue Williamson is a practising artist based in Cape Town. She frequently exhibits internationally and has participated in the Sydney Biennial of 1992 and in 'The New Republics' at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne in 2000. In 1989 Sue published *Resistance Art in South Africa* (David Philip Publishers, CT, and St Martin's Press, New York) and in 1996, in a co-authorship with Ashraf Jamal, wrote *Art in South Africa, the Future Present*. She is the founding editor of www.artthrob.co.za, an online magazine on contemporary art in South Africa.

Truth Games is a series of interactive artworks that reflect on the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the healing/not healing of post-

apartheid South Africa. Each piece pictures an accuser, a defender, and an image of the event in question. At no time are all three images visible, as text taken from the transcripts and printed on slats obscures sections. Viewers are invited to slide these slats across different parts of the images to conceal or reveal parts in an attempt to replicate the action of the country in trying to decide whether the truth is being spoken or still hidden. The titles of the works in *Truth Games* reflect the names of accuser and perpetrator and include one of the statements made by one of the people involved. Reflecting on her art Sue comments: 'In my work, I attempt to re-contextualise issues of contemporary South African history. By mediating through art the myriad images and information offered for public consumption in the mass media, I try to give dispassionate readings and offer a focus and new opportunities for engagement. Art can provide a distance and a space for such considerations'.

Tony Yengeni — 'wet bag' torture — *Jeff Benzien* from the *Truth Games* series hangs in the dining room of the new Big Brother reality show on South African TV which opened in early August. It is hoped that Sue's work will act to stimulate discussion of 'weightier issues than before'. In September 2002, a number of other pieces from the series will be hung in St George's Cathedral for the ceremonial handing over of the final Truth and Reconciliation Commission report from Archbishop Desmond Tutu on behalf of the TRC commissioners to President Thabo Mbeki. These two very different appearances for *Truth Games* meet Sue's desire to create art for a popular audience.



'Hands-on' at the Dakawa Art Centre, Grahamstown (National Arts Festival, 1999)

Truth Games

1. *Joyce Mtimkulu — to ash — Col. Nic van Rensburg* (1998).

Simphiwo Mtimkulu was an Eastern Cape student jailed for his consciousness-raising activities. Fed rat poison while in jail, he was released, only to disappear from his home shortly afterwards. His mother campaigned actively to uncover the truth after his abandoned car was 'discovered' by the police near the South African border. After years of silence, the police admitted responsibility for killing him and burning his body.

2. *Family of Guguletu Seven — why were you smiling — Capt. John Sterrenberg* (1998).

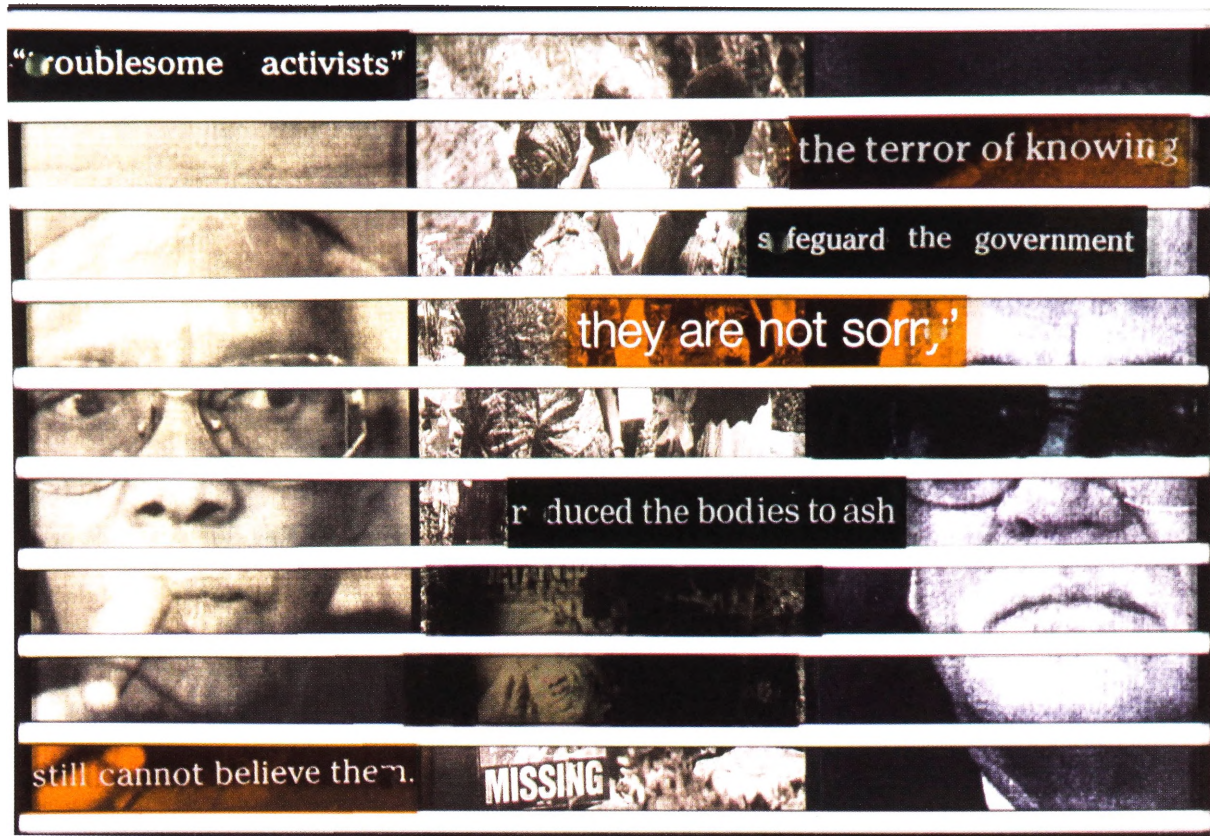
The Guguletu Seven, as they became known, died in a shootout with the police on March 3 1986 in Guguletu. The seven activists were Zandisile Mjobo, Zola Swelani, Mandla Mxinwa, Godfrey Miya, Themba Mlifi, Zabonke Konile and Christopher Piet. Two consecutive inquests at the time cleared the police, but relatives of the seven urged the TRC to investigate the matter further, and nine policemen were subpoenaed to give evidence. At the hearing, Capt. John Sterrenberg was asked why he had been 'photographed smiling' next to the dead body of Christopher Piet.

3. *Liezl Ackerman — not a church — Gcinikhaya Makoma* (1998).

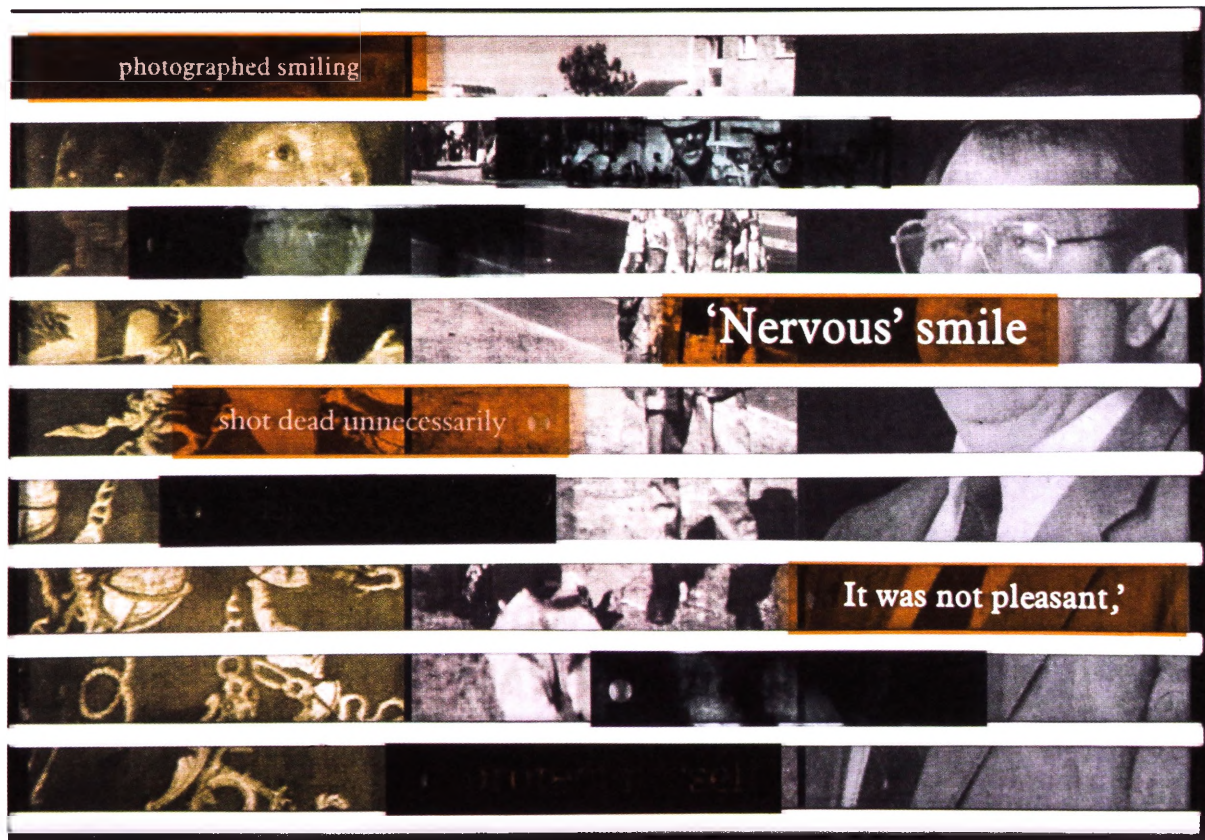
In July 1993, five young members of the APLA — the Azanian People's Liberation Army, attacked the congregation of St James Church, in Kenilworth, Cape Town, bursting into the packed church with guns, and eleven people died. Marita Ackerman, mother of Liezl Ackerman, was one of them. The only member of the group convicted of the attack, Gcinikhaya Makoma, was granted amnesty in June 1998. In an interchange with Liezl Ackerman, Makoma said he was sorry about the death, but maintained his position as a soldier of the struggle.

4. *Mrs Jansen — can never forgive — Afrika Hlapo* (1998).

Mr Jansen was the victim of mob violence in Crossroads, a squatter camp near Cape Town. Driving through Crossroads at a time of public unrest in the late eighties, his vehicle was overturned and set alight. He died the following day. Seeking amnesty and reconciliation, Afrika Hlapo, jailed for the killing, said his intention had been to seek a better world for South Africa, and expressed his desire to meet with the Jansen family. This request was refused by the widow.



1. *Joyce Mtimkulu — to ash* — Col. Nic van Rensburg (1998).
 Colour laser prints, wood, metal, plastic, perspex 80cm x 120 cm x 6 cm.



2. *Family of Guguletu Seven — why were you smiling — Capt. John Sterrenberg (1998).*
 Colour laser prints, wood, metal, plastic, perspex 80cm x 120 cm x 6 cm.



3. Liezl Ackerman — *not a church* — Gcinikhaya Makoma (1998).
 Colour laser prints, wood, metal, plastic, perspex 80cm x 120 cm x 6 cm.



4. *Mrs Jansen — can never forgive — Afrika Hlapo (1998).*
 Colour laser prints, wood, metal, plastic, perspex 80cm x 120 cm x 6 cm.



Figure 1
Married women at a cultural event in full traditional regalia (adapted from earlier forms) of an area called oThwebe. They are led by a head woman (carrying the red umbrella) who decides fashion changes.

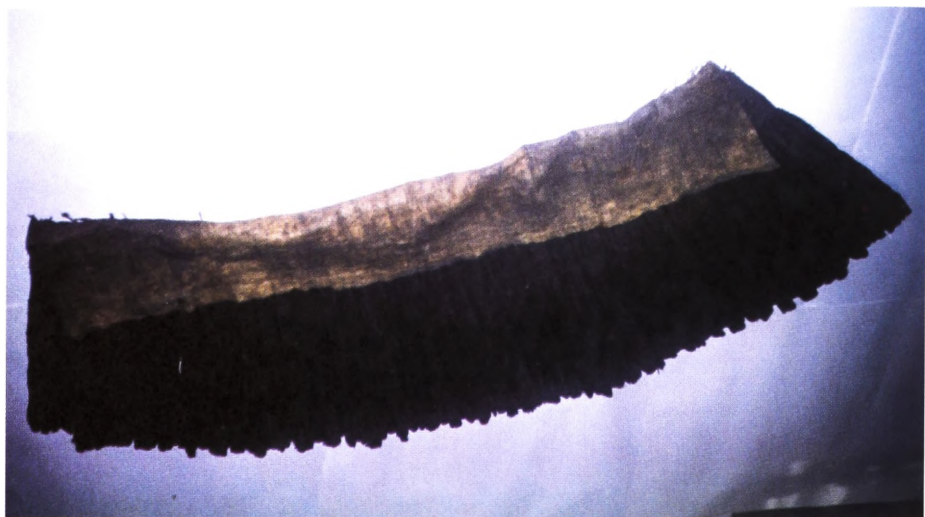


Figure 2

A black leather skirt, *isidwaba* — made from goat or cow skin. A very prestigious possession, equivalent to the Western wedding band.



Figure 3

A waist apron worn over the hide skirt, *utshodo lwangasemuva*. This item shows how cloth (Western item) could in contemporary times be used with beads that in their original African forms would be made from stones, seeds and wood.

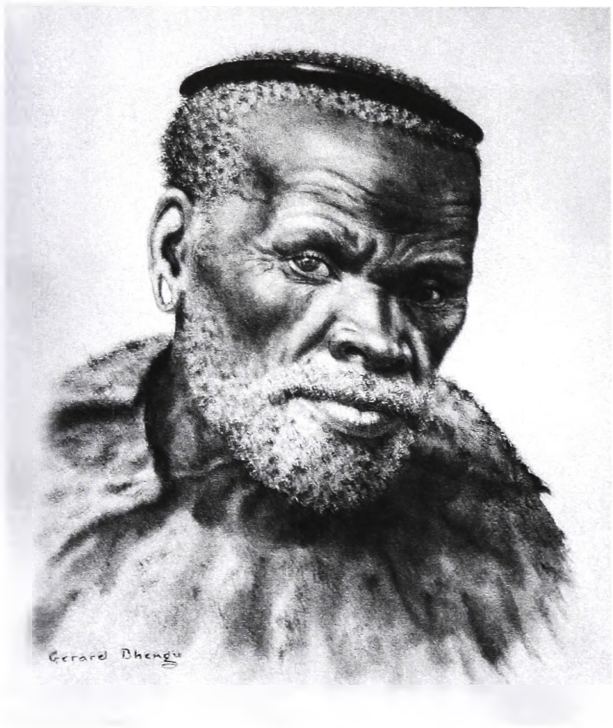


Figure 4
A man's head-ring, *ungiyane* — made from a mimosa tree. Indicates high regard for men who have excelled in their calling (as warrior, headman of a village).



Figure 5
A layered cotton dress item, *umtako* — worn by married women, wrapped around the waist over the black hide skirt. The cloth layers are indicative of the number of years that a woman has been married.



Figure 6

Girls at a cultural event — their dress is symbolic of their status. They are still single but do have boyfriends. Their skirts (now in beads) used to be cut into tassels from barks of *ubendle*, a shrub bearing yellow edible blooms and leaves which always hang down. Contemporary beads simulate old forms.

THENJIWE MAGWAZA

The Conceptualisation of Zulu Traditional Female Dress in the Post-Apartheid Era

Dress is a powerful means of communication that makes statements about the gender role of an individual from birth. The concept of clothing as a principal vehicle of social and personal information presupposes a common level of understanding among the audience to whom the communication is intended. It makes dramatic statements about social categories and changes from one social category to another as regulated by place, occasion, age, status, as well as values that reflect the social hierarchy of a community. It is in light of this perceived capacity for dress to 'speak' — or what has been termed the 'pregnant' nature of dress — that Justine Cordwell and Ronald Schwartz urge readers to learn to read and grasp dress as 'signs in the same way we learn to read and understand language', that they might more fully comprehend the complexities of cultural representation (1).

This essay attempts to place the contemporary dress of the Zulu female into a socio-political framework, and critiques the fact that despite radical social and political transformations, which are documented in the changing mode of male dress, some of the present conventions of female dress remain unchanged since the eighteenth century and thus fix women within certain 'traditional' roles. The focus of the article is mainly limited to the rural Ndwedwe district — a Durban Municipality area of KwaZulu-Natal, where, unlike fifty years ago, traditional Zulu dress is largely worn during weekends and at ceremonies and festivals. Reference to Zulu dress in this article should be understood in this context.

1 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO AGE

Dress in the Zulu society traditionally varies according to one's age. From infancy to old age, there is a variety of dress items that the individual wears successively. The Ndwedwe society, like most rural traditional societies, has a tendency to concretise abstract concepts, a thinking which gives dress a strong symbolic value as pertains to the great milestones in the life cycle of a people. This symbolisation produces different kinds of dress, which are seen as outer signs for the stages of life through which a Zulu female passes and of her connection at each stage with her community. While in contemporary urban societies, the 'modern' urban woman seems to defy time, refusing to submit to age through her dress, in areas like Ndwedwe that still uphold traditional folk

culture, people are not afraid to look old and dress the part of grandmother without benefit of beauty parlour and cosmetic camouflage (Magwaza 201).

In the Ndwedwe district, it is apparent that dress is not only a repository of meanings regarding gender roles but is also a vehicle for perpetuating or rendering changes in gender roles, and differentiation by age. In this region dress is very closely associated with the various stages of growth in the Zulu person's life cycle: that is, birth, childhood, youth, marriage, and old age. Dress items and bodily ornamentation can be graphed from a minimum during infancy, through a crescendo of weight and visual intensity in the prime of life, to a falling off in middle and later years when activities associated with dress items cease to be a preoccupation.

About fifty years ago one would not find a Ndwedwe Zulu unadorned, on a daily basis, with some kind of personal embellishment symbolic of cultural status. Within several weeks of birth, children of both sexes would obtain waist, sometimes neck, wrist, and ankle beads provided by the parents and/or other relatives. This has changed in contemporary times as it is almost exclusively females (little emphasis or obligation being placed on males) who are expected to exhibit the progress to full adulthood through the wearing of distinctive styles of dress with ascending values of complexity that mark physical and social maturity. A widely held belief is that dress plays a significant role in ensuring that the cultural ideals of family sanctity are upheld. This pertains specifically to sexual looseness: an austere and disciplined cultivation of character is the underlying expectation for young women who are expected to progress through the maturation hierarchy to an 'honourable marriage'. The Ndwedwe Zulu hopes to avoid unplanned childbirth and HIV contraction by instilling cultural traditional norms — a process that places enormous pressure on young women in particular, and one in which dress plays a vital role.

1.2 YOUNG GIRLS

The maturation process of pre-adolescent girls is distinguishable by the increasing number of bead ornaments. During ceremonial dancing the wearing of bead ornaments culminates in intricate and elaborate finery. Dancing is very important to the girls because it is during these times that they hope to meet their husbands to be, hence, they also go to great length in preparing for them. They make or buy colourful articles: girls who do not have the money to buy, or time to make, their own ornaments, borrow from their mothers or other girls to ensure that they are equally noticeable. Jean Morris and Ben Levitas claim that when dancing, girls' firm bosoms and tight thighs are meant to be a positive indication of virginity and moral rectitude (38). This expectation (an understood requirement) places the responsibility of upholding and sustaining the Zulu society's moral values on the girls' shoulders. It is expected that the breasts (budding as they may be) of the young unmarried girls will be uncovered. During traditional ceremonies clothing (in a Western sense) is considered less important since it obscures the

visibility of the female body and its development, hence girls wear no clothes — only waist beads. However, with the mingling of different cultures, some girls are covering their buttocks with cloths underneath their waist beads.

Artefacts worn by adolescents distinguish them into a system of ordered age groupings, each of which has its leader. An *ijongosi* is a girl between the ages of eight and thirteen, and she would normally wear: an *izingeje/ ojibilili* — tussle shaped necklace made of beads; an *isigege* — frontal-covering skirt, made of beads or wool; and an *amadavathi* — anklets, made of beads, stones and wire. An *itshitshi* is a girl between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Her requisite dress includes: wearing layers of cloths, usually undecorated; hair plaited with black wool; *ungifase* — beaded necklace with its end in a bundle form; *amadavathi* — anklets.

1.3 A GIRL OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE

Zulu girls compared to girls of other tribal/cultural groups are considered ready for marriage at an early age. By her beadwork apron, hip draperies and other beadwork she announces herself to be single but ripe for marriage.¹ (See figure 6.) The early age at which girls fulfil this role may be a result of physical readiness, for once a girl begins to menstruate, she may be considered ready to start a family. It should, however, be pointed out that nowadays with a number of girls menstruating earlier than the expected marriageable age (15–18 years) this attitude is slowly changing. Ndwedwe villages still maintain the tradition of building menstruating huts. A girl goes into the hut at the first signs of menstruation and stays there for four to seven days. After remaining there for that number of days, a girl is expected to throw out her old clothing, put on a set of fresh clothes and cut her fingernails and hair. Whilst in the menstrual hut, older girls or older women of the household, admonish the girl throughout the week on how she is now to conduct herself, what is expected of her in terms of good behaviour, ethics and morals. She is also cautioned about possible misadventures in the handling of men, instructed in the behaviour patterns that are expected of women, the values and ideals that should be upheld, and appropriate responses to male behaviour.

To mark her entry into adulthood and the approach of marriageable age, a ceremony is performed at the end of her secluded days that includes feasting for the whole village. This occasion also provides a ritual context in which to promote and ask for auspiciousness and favour from the ancestors. A girl of marriageable age may have the *umemulo* (a coming of age feast and ceremony) performed for her by her father after she has been seen and proved to be a well behaved girl who upholds societal and family values. The ceremony, joyously celebrated in public, is a celebration of the potential fertility of a girl as well as the public announcement of her marriageable status (nowadays performed when the girl is over the age of eighteen). At the ceremony, the girl dons the cowhide skirt of a married woman, *isidwaba*, for the first time. (See figure 2.) Barbara Tyrrell notes that these indirect² performances alert young men to the girl's marriageable status (113) (which is in

reality, a confirmation of her commodity status by which the woman is rendered the object of a cultural/social transaction).

1.4 THE MARRIED WOMAN

Although a married woman's adornment with beads and bodily modifications — such as head gear sewn on to her hair, ear piercings or incisions on her skin — may provide some basis for differentiation there is a limit to how much can be used without becoming ostentatious considering that she is not on the market any more. Women are more constrained by Zulu cultural heritage than men as they are the ones who are expected to uphold, sustain and transmit the traditions to their off-spring. In contrast to male attire and adornment, a woman's expected dress and personal decoration appropriate to the stage she is in, is a graphic autobiography by which she can accurately recall or retell the events of her life. She carries this personal and social chronology and teaches it to her children. Each item worn carries significance beyond the simple appearance of the woman concerned. It tells about the relationship she has with her husband as well as other people. It may tell, for example, whether the husband is at home or away, if he is alive or dead, or if she is his only partner or one of many wives.

Girls who are about to wed, recently wedded brides, and older married women cover their breasts, shoulders and knees out of deference to, and reverence for, their husbands and the families into which they have married or will marry. This may however differ from one family to the next: some families maintain that a woman must cover breasts and shoulders when away from home but not necessarily at the homestead. The scarf or cloak, either worn over the shoulders or across the upper body, that is, from shoulder to waist is, according to Christian Msimang, of particular importance (184). This garment is adopted by married women out of respect for their husband's fathers and other senior men of the family whether alive or dead, and for the homestead. Of equal significance with this material sign of respect is the adherence to a set of social skills: when addressing these men or in their presence, women adopt a particular attitude and behave in a particular manner that might include avoiding eye contact, bending the face downward, and adopting a position (whether kneeling, sitting or standing) that is never higher than the men in their company. These are the most obvious signs of other (more subtle) restrictions imposed on women.

There may be dress restrictions placed upon a woman depending on the state that she is in at a particular time. Death, for instance, restricts a woman in her choice of dress as does the fact that she has recently given birth. On either occasion she is not permitted to wear bright clothes. After having had a child she remains 'polluted and impure' for weeks, whilst after having lost a husband she is considered polluted for the minimum of a year, during which time she can not attend ceremonies or any other gatherings where she may be seen by a large number of people, and neither is she allowed to prepare traditional foodstuff like beer or partake in festivities. She is considered a bad omen whilst in mourning

dress. It is only after a cleansing ceremony has been performed by her own people (not the dead husband's people), that taboos with all the stigmas attached are lifted from her and she can be accepted back into the community's activities. It should be noted that the black skin skirt of marriage, *isidwaba*, should be worn at all traditional ceremonies and festivities even after the death of her husband.

The way hair is dressed is also indicative of a woman's marital stage (Tyrrell and Jurgens 39). A Zulu married woman has a tall, red ochre hairstyle, a token of marriage, which she wears in reverence for her husband's family. Women's hair ornaments (of purely decorative function, unlike men's) are pinned onto the topknot and are edged with a bead band — also a sign of reverence for her husband's family. When physical beauty wanes at middle age, and after the birth of children, preoccupation with elegant dress wanes too. It is only on rare special social occasions that elegant dress is worn. Due to the weight of beads, most articles now worn are made of wool, which is lighter. An older woman's ensemble of decoration, if she still wears traditional dress, tends toward darker colours as well as larger beads than those worn by younger women. The latter may reflect which beads were available from traders at the time of purchase and which area of birth she comes from. Some old Ndwedwe women, even during traditional ceremonies and festivals, opt not to wear traditional dress having given away all articles to other people, mainly younger women.

Distinguishing age by dress encourages sexual overtures in socially approved ways, and in effect, guarantees male dominance and importance, as most of what the female folk do is for the interest and benefit of men. In addition to dress, specific body modifications concur with gender expectations and encourage younger girls to learn to direct their own acts of dress according to those expectations.

2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO REGION

The focus in the Zulu costume culture is not on the individual but upon the community. Groups wear and may carry special garments or accessories that identify them as members of a specific group. Richard Dorson is of the view that one of the unwritten laws of folk costume is that the individual is not completely free to express individuality in dress but rather the dress must indicate the individual's conforming participation not only in his or her age, sex, and status groups within the unified community but also in the area of abode (280).

The very real sense of purpose of dress within a folk community is, according to Msimang, to de-individualise the individual (18). By insisting on the submergence of individual identity to community values, dress affords each community unity. There is a division even among the Zulu communities themselves — each community manifesting its own peculiarities. It is interesting to note that such divisions are not only recognisable in the traditional settings but can also be seen in the contemporary African Christian churches. In the churches, the structure of folk community is seen in the degree to which individuals find it necessary to

dress with uniformity so as to set themselves apart from other denominations. Even within a denomination, members sit in their appropriate age and marital status categories; and each of these would have its own duties, meetings and peculiar dress codes. Here, then, is evidence of the Zulu modern society having transmitted and translated what happens in its traditional setting to new institutions.

Costume is one of the symbols of folk community and one of the variables of a culture. As a symbol, it expresses the basic needs as well as the basic structure of a community and as a variable it is like regional architecture, a means of identifying the local, and the vernacular. Folk costume is the visible outward badge of folk group identity, that is deliberately and consciously worn to express that identity. 'The identity that is geographically determined is important and necessary as an expression that a particular locality or region is distinct, and should be easily identified' (Dorson 295). The Ndwedwe style of dress, like other regions of KwaZulu-Natal is communicative of the community's communal identity. Today, that communal identity strives and is mainly maintained in female traditional clothing only. A few men still subscribe to communal clothing, but for most men, traditional dress has come to mean a dress style of any African country that an individual may choose to adopt.

All Zulu female dress may seem to a person who is foreign to the tradition quite similar if not exactly the same. In earlier times before colourful beads were adopted as part of traditional dress, differences between groups would not warrant a discussion; and in later times dress and ornamentation difference between distinctive areas grew increasingly subtle and minute, being largely based on beadal colour combination and patternation, discernable only to the educated or familiar eye. Yet, for Zulu women, beads have come to be the determinants of regional differentiation, and nearly all beaded items worn by females have varying sizes, colour combinations, shapes, and styles. Having distinctive features of beadal style, enables a person conversant with individual dress 'grammars' to spot somebody of a particular tribe at some distance with ease.

In an appraisal of rural areas like Ndwedwe, Msimang maintains that the subtle differences in dress for each region are prescribed by that community and its form is dictated by the community's tradition, and the meaning thereof is influenced by the caste (group) of a person visually identified by her dress (7). This is equally true of the Ndwedwe area. Whatever meaning is expressed through dress is only understood through relationships with other people; that is, there needs to be people who will be able to interpret it appropriately. If there are people who are able to decipher intended meanings, a response acknowledging comprehension of what is intended will be stimulated. While general levels of symbolic information may be shared by the various people, it cannot be assumed that a member of one area would give the same interpretation to a common symbolic form, as would one of their neighbours. Colour symbolism (distinct for different areas) is a good example of this strong degree of variability.

Regional differences come to the fore more often when groups of girls from different geographical areas perform in peculiar uniforms in ceremonies. Dress and its finery in one group may represent one thing, in another it may represent something different, in still another something else, hence a variety of interpretations of one item of dress and beaded colours or colours of beads is possible.

2.1 CHANGE IN REGIONAL DRESS

As I began to study dress scientifically, taking into account the influence of evolution over time and culture, I realised that one of the main elements of costume is change. Change that eventually spreads through the whole community is initiated by the upper class or people with a status in a homestead, for example, a head wife in a polygamous family, or wives of chiefs. (See figure 1, p. 171.) Thereafter a kind of dress will become a custom. In the case of the Ndwedwe Zulu female dress, a remarkable change can be seen in styles of beadwork. The beadwork has been adapted to incorporate new features of the environment, depending on the contact and influence prevalent at the time. One such change can be observed in traditional women's headdress. During the early to mid twentieth century, women's headdresses were sewn onto their hair, thus becoming a permanent feature of dress, but now the headdress more often takes the form of a detachable top knot. These are used by women who work in towns and those who need such headgear for special cultural occasions. Some women however use these as gala dress and for hiring out to brides or any other women who may need headgear for temporary purposes. The traditional headdress survives in new form — adapted to fit the new environment in which Zulu women find themselves.

Once adopted, adaptations like this last longer in rural areas, as in Ndwedwe, because of a 'cultural lag' that is based on rural conservatism. It was observed (from my doctoral study) that some areas within the Ndwedwe region — eMaphephetheni, KwaNgcolosi and oThwebe — have preserved quite archaic cultural items of dress and adhere to a traditional sense of dress that is quite rigid, whilst others nearby but less rural (KwaNyuswa, eMolweni, eNgonweni) display urban dress or traditional dress with urban touches or vice versa; and some of the Ndwedwe Zulu who wear factory-made Western clothing adapt that clothing to their own ideas, omitting or adding certain objects or materials (glass/plastic beads, decorative stones, and wire) that the factory makers had not initially intended for garment use. Figure 3 (p. 172) is evidence of this kind of adaptation. However, although the Ndwedwe Zulu female dress may not be entirely homemade and archaic across all related groups, it is folk-cultural in the sense of its use and function within the folk community. Despite change due to adaptation of items from Western culture, dress is still very much the badge of group identity and is still as related to 'tradition' and to community values as it was a hundred years ago.

3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO STATUS

In the traditional community, female status according to dress involves several levels, the most basic of which is marital status. In the Ndwedwe area, women's dress is especially differentiated to signal marriage or the process toward it. The dress of a recently married girl and a woman who has been married for some time, though almost uniform, would reflect subtle variations, for example, change of colour or colour combination, length of a skirt or different hair styles.

Dress also signifies the position one has in the community or in the family. A head woman of a polygamous family may be adorned differently from her co-wives. MaMduna of oThwebe, Camperdown village, adjacent to Ndwedwe said 'I am the one who decides on the colours and certain dress articles that other women [co-wives and women of her village who are under her leadership as a head woman] are to wear for a particular occasion'. MaMduna is also the head woman of all married women of oThwebe. Her dress influence would seem to conform to the general laws of costume cited by Dorson (280): his claim that the upper level (person of high rank) partially determines and/or influences dress development of people in lower levels clearly applies to the Zulu traditional setting of oThwebe (refer to figure 1).

Dress does not only symbolise, but can dictate, the behaviours and roles expected of people on the basis of their various and sometimes multiple connections with each other and can, therefore, distinguish the powerful from the weak, the rich from the poor, the hero from the outcast, the conformer from the non-conformer, the leader from the follower and the insider from the outsider. As much as status is spoken of through dress, so is the wearer's personality. It is, however the marital status demarcations which speak and feature much more than indicators of individual personality in Zulu female dress. Status distinction through dress has always been common and readily identifiable in male folk dress, however, items of dress worn by men not only indicate the status but also, significantly, the personal achievements of male individuals. (Refer to figure 4, p. 173.) The following brief discussion of male folk dress will articulate the essential difference between male and female status in the Zulu community.

3.1 FEMALE STATUS AS OPPOSED TO MALE STATUS

In Zulu society men and women achieve status differently. Women achieve recognition through a process associated with attaining physical and moral maturation, marriage and eventually reproducing (Msimang 46). On the other hand, men gain recognition through political or economic achievement — such achievements are expressed through dress. Women's clothing has never reflected the shifting political position of the wearer as did the clothing of men, rather, most female dress items are more indicative of the age or marital status of the wearer. Status distinctions among women have always been articulated and recognised through particularities of dress that correspond to the five stages of Zulu womanhood — pre-puberty, puberty, maturity, marriage and motherhood.

Confirming Msimang's contention, a Ndwedwe informant, MaMduna, stressed that the sequence of the developmental stages for women are dependent on external signs of physical maturation and public acknowledgement of these changes through rituals and ceremonies.

Men, on the other hand, have always ascended through economic achievement (acquiring as much livestock as possible), political achievement (being a part of a regiment and/or fulfilling the orders of the chief or commander with the hope of attaining the status of commander), and personal achievements — for which they are given prestigious recognition in the form of headdress ornamentation indicative of heroism and cattle handouts by the king for outstanding contributions to the community. Each progression for men, usually political, is associated with a change in attire that reflects their newly acquired position. In contemporary times ascension to a higher status is realised not only through a dress item but through affording positions of power to men (in community, political and cultural organisations) whilst most women's capabilities as leaders are not realised or well recognised.

This status quo continues even in the new post-apartheid political dispensation that prides itself on being a 'leader of democracy' in Africa. In the rural Ndwedwe community, even in the twenty-first century, there is not much evidence of the function of clothing as a means of communicating a new economic and political status for women. One of the few indicators of change in women's status, as represented by name and dress, can be seen in the figure of *iqhikiza*. In the colonial and apartheid eras, *iqhikiza*, the senior maiden, was one of the few females who were accorded status. Younger women would be entrusted to *iqhikiza*. Her duty was to advise younger maidens on how to behave, advice being given specifically on love matters (a subject that put men at the centre). She had distinct dress items that identified her status. She would be adorned in much more colourful dress items than other girls and carry a stick confirming her position. It is interesting to note that the contemporary Ndwedwe's *iqhikiza* has a newly acquired status code: she is referred to as *induna yamantombazane esigodi*, a chief or head maiden of a region or village. Such a name indicates women's desire to attain equal status with men — the word *iduna* (chief) having a male connotation. The chief maiden's status indicator is a swipe, *imvubu*, a short spear and (optionally) a shield, all of which are generally carried by men. One cannot avoid perceiving this change (name and items carried) as indicative of young women's desire for inclusion in a system that largely excludes women from positions of political and economic status, and as a protest against a system that glorifies men.

4 DRESS, APPEARANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Gender is a social construction. Accordingly, appearance is one medium through which we articulate and shape our impressions of what it means to be male or female. As is the case in other societies, the Zulu use forms of appearance to construct a masculine or feminine image. We are led to think about the cultural meanings linked to gender in a particular way. Gender ideology is not only about

gender categories, but also pertains to the relation between these categories and the tension resulting from an ideology that over-emphasises the importance of personal appearance, as indicated by formal adherence to dress codes, for females, and under emphasises it for males.

In order to understand present meanings of female dress, an analysis of gender ideology specific to the Zulu community is necessary. Such an analysis includes how the ideology is culturally communicated as well as how it applies to the lives of Zulu females and males. In the Zulu culture, maleness is associated with the challenging roles of 'action' and femaleness is associated with the passive notion of the decorative. Susan Kaiser refers to this kind of ideology as a 'dichotomy of doing versus being, a cultural mechanism for socially organising gender' (76). This ideology has been perpetuated even in the post-apartheid era, with little or no change evident.

However, it is interesting to note that gender distinctions within the communities that are still clad in traditional dress were not as strongly marked before and during the colonial period. From the latter years of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, both men and women wore beads and skirt-like clothing around their waists. The male skirt-like clothing, *ibheshu*, may have been dropped by men out of fear of ridicule. *Ibheshu* resembled nothing that was worn by the 'masters' but that which was worn by the wives of the 'masters'. Hence it can be surmised that Zulu men avoided wearing clothing styles they now viewed as connoting feminine qualities — the feminine as seen through colonial eyes — and thus the use of beads was also dropped. As societies were transformed from predominantly rural to urban industrial entities, the 'new' values that emerged were amplified by the Zulu traditional way of life which, tied to a desire to emulate the white employers' dress code, resulted in a dress code for Zulu men that signified their individuality and economic advancement. These values were not translated to women or women's dress, rather, in the new dispensation that followed the apartheid era, the call for 'African renaissance' and the perceived need to claim back African cultures and way of life, saw an entrenchment of the alignment of women's traditional status (marked by physical stages of maturation) with the apparel of women's traditional dress.

In the era of the new dispensation, Zulu male traditional clothing has changed remarkably in its move away from specific or regional traditional cultural forms. Men do not have to be clad in animal skins and beads to be considered 'traditionally dressed', but the 'traditional' styles of other parts of Africa (central, eastern and western) have been adopted. In its simplest form, a fabric shirt, with or without embroidery or animal print, is sufficient to serve as an African traditional mark. The shirt is worn with pants of any fabric, length or style. On the other hand, women have continued to be assigned a highly restrictive dress code, signifying their age, marital status and region from which they originate. A black skin skirt, *isidwaba*, still identifies a married woman, and situates her within a tradition that restricts her freedom of movement — culturally, socially and physically. *Isidwaba*

is not only heavy, as it is made from the raw skin of an animal, it must be covered in a black stuff (polish and/or oil that maintains its colour and shine) that stains the body and any surface that a woman may sit on. The cloth and beads that are used to cover *isidwaba* must be formed into layers that signify the number of years of marriage. Figure 1 (p. 173) is an example of one such kind of dress item (layered), signifying a woman's number of years in marriage. Having worn *isidwaba* (with its accessories) myself, I find it physically uncomfortable and extremely heavy.

Such restrictive codes are also applied to unmarried women. The unmarried woman's colour of clothes and beads are clearly indicative of her marital status. It is clear that whilst Zulu women continue to be trapped in a traditional identity and definition, men have been allowed the freedom to borrow from convenient styles of any other African country; and unlike most female dress items, which are made by the labour of their own hands, the male 'traditional' dress (constituting only a shirt) is readily available in most shops. Such convenience allows men a freedom of choice and an option to express their individualism as they wish, whilst women continue to endure a restricted routine and conservative code of femininity.

In summary, it can be seen that female dress is a vehicle that is being used to encourage the Zulu to 'return to their roots', however, it cannot be denied, as Sandra Klopper notes, that 'dress is probably one of the only means left to articulate relations that have been disrupted through economic and political transformation' (156). A specific female dress code has thus been used by Zulu men as a means of asserting their power and maintaining control over their wives and girlfriends under the pretext that dress is one tool that captures and retains the essence of the Zulu.

NOTES

- ¹ This need not necessarily be in relation to her personal wish. It is her family, with her father or other male relatives assuming much of the responsibility, who usually decree her as being 'ready'.
- ² The indirect nature of these actions is seen in the fact that, unlike in other traditional Zulu ceremonies there are no clear verbal utterances of the reasons behind such dress code. Sometimes songs, composed by age-mates of the girl may be sung — bearing figurative lyrics that make reference to the new status of the girl.

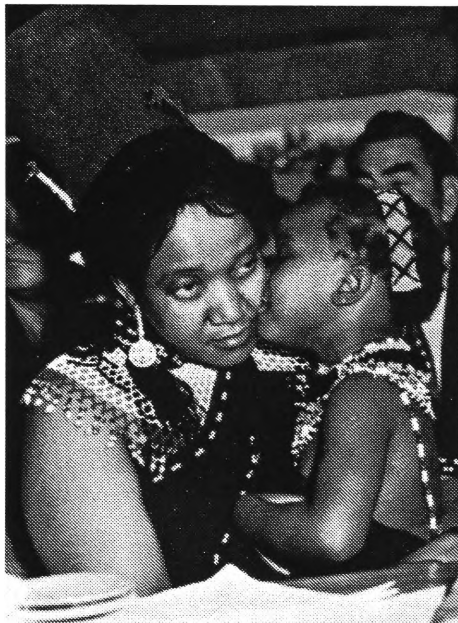
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LIZ GUNNER

A Royal Woman, an Artist, and the Ambiguities of National Belonging: The Case of Princess Constance Magogo



A momentous event on the South African performing arts scene takes place in Durban's Playhouse Opera on May 4, with the world premiere of the new Zulu opera, *Princess Magogo*. (Press Release, Durban, South Africa, April 2002)

'New Zulu opera a fascinating event' — 'A brand new opera being broadcast live to other parts of the world is heady stuff here in KZN.' (Margeret van Klemperer, *Natal Witness* May 6, 2002)

'...the highlight of the event was the timeous awarding of the posthumous lifetime achievement to Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu, the mother of the Home Affairs Minister Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who accepted the award on her behalf.' (Mduduzi Dlamini on the 8th South African Music Awards ceremony. *City Press* May 5, 2002)

Why should an opera on the life of a royal woman, renowned as a composer and performer, with an access to an extraordinarily rich archive of Zulu culture, be hitting the headlines at this particular juncture in South Africa, eight years on from its first free elections in 1994? The opera, called simply, *Princess Magogo*, was staged by Opera Africa for three brief nights in Durban in early May 2002, with the diva of South African singers, Sibongile Khumalo, playing the title role. Her father, Mzilikazi Khumalo, composed the music and the librettist was the writer, Themba Msimang. The versatile Thembi Venturas directed the opera, and the flamboyant set and costumes were the work of Andrew Verster. The focus on a woman flies in the face of the accumulation of the construction of Zulu identity around male figures, and around a particular kind of machismo and patriarchy, a process, which as Carolyn Hamilton has incisively pointed out in her fine study of Shaka, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical*

Invention (1998), was one in which both settlers and indigenous intellectuals and image makers participated. If, as Hamilton argues, the figure of Shaka has become increasingly established as a central metaphor in South African politics, then what role could be played in the shaping of current ideas by a new art work which draws on Zulu history — albeit more recent history — from a consciously gendered perspective?

My intention in this essay is not to comment a great deal on the opera, but to provide an insight into the complex ways in which the historical Princess Magogo can indeed be seen as a crucial figure at a moment of flux and uncertainty in the national imaginary. She can be read in a number of ways, and is without doubt a polysemic figure. My interpretation will focus on the way in which she allows access to another possible configuring of what shaped Zulu identity in the past, and so gives a different view on how such an identity could be articulated, in the present and in the future.

The Durban Playhouse, the venue for the opera, has previously opened its doors to a long and successful run of the veteran dramatist Mbongeni Ngema's musical, *Zulu*, in 2000 and again in 2001. Also, shortly before the new opera, the Playhouse showed the musical, *The Spear is Born*, by the relatively unknown writer and actor, F.R. Mhlongo. The title used the shorthand of his most famous praise name, 'The Spear' (*iLembe*) to signal its intention to focus in a very direct way on the life of King Shaka, 'The Spear', who forged the short-lived Zulu kingdom in a brief decade (1818–1828) before being murdered by his half-brother and successor, Dingane. The contrasts in approach to the subject of the Zulu by these two musicals is itself a fascinating insight into generational differences vis-à-vis contemporary readings of this controversial hero figure. Both musicals present readings of the intangible but ever-present 'Zuluness' that is a feature of both regional (in the province of KwaZulu-Natal — 'KZN') and national life in South Africa. Ngema's sprawling, historical story, with its unbridled cultural nationalism beamed mainly at current black audiences searching for a rooted present identity, is studded with energetic and captivating dance numbers reminiscent of his earlier struggle era musical, *Serafina*. The narrative turns on the fortunes of the last independent Zulu king, Cetshwayo (father of Dinuzulu), his defeat of the British at Isandlwana in January 1879, and the British victory at his capital of Ulundi six months later.

The focus on the figure of Shaka in the musical by F.R. Mhlongo presents him as an icon of the continent, a hero for the modern age, but also a figure linked to the younger generation. Shaka is played by a *young* man; it is youth and the struggles of youth in an era of crisis that emerge as a key concern, closely shadowing the more conventional narrative of the hero. Perhaps this somewhat unexpected twinning explains the predominance of young people in the packed audience on the night when I attended a performance at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, on the University of Natal's Durban campus, in March 2001, shortly



Photo of Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu in *Petticoat Pioneers: Women of Distinction*, comp. Ruth Gordon.

before the group set out on its 'world' tour. There may have been other reasons as well, for its popularity. It chose to highlight the popular musical form known as *maskanda*, thought to have grown from what was originally a women's form of solitary song (James 72) which allows modern troubadour figures to sing in a form that is recognisably contemporary and yet clearly draws on 'tradition'. Its practitioners, the most famous of whom was the male singer, Umfaz' Omnyama [Black Woman], whose early death from cancer in April 2001 occasioned a near

national mourning and a huge funeral in the country town of Nongoma, comment eloquently and often trenchantly, on the modern situation both locally and globally. Both these musicals, however, assume that the grand narratives that help to give people a sense of belonging are in some important way fixed on heroic figures — Shaka, forger of a kingdom, and in the case of Ngema's musical, the heroic, if reluctant, colonial resister, King Cetshwayo father of Dinuzulu.

An opera with its focus on *Princess Magogo*, daughter of Dinuzulu and granddaughter of King Cetshwayo, could bring to the fore a rather different set of questions. What space for a new discourse on women and national belonging might be signalled through the opera? What imaging of the past and present might the new opera on Princess Magogo give its audiences? Will the fact that it is opera and not a musical mean that it automatically moves into a realm of high culture that removes it from being part of a broader popular culture: the spices, smells and cacophony of the market space, the hectic taxis and their rude drivers, the haunting, strident guitar music and the urban-rural singers such as the late Umfaz' Omnyama, who strive to capture all that, and more? What set of discourses will it attempt to be part of? And who will constitute its main audiences? Will Princess Magogo become another national icon, a gendered icon, alongside the sorrowful Saartje Baartman, whose bones the French government returned to South African shores on May 3rd 2002, the day before the *Princess Magogo* opera opened for its world premier in Durban? Who will fight to own her? And will there be a winner? Will she be a contested figure, claimed by many different sections of the national, social and even global imaginary?

* * *

Who *was* the historical Princess Magogo? Born in 1900, the year in which her father Dinuzulu returned from exile on St Helena, she was a member of the Zulu royal house, sister of Solomon kaDinuzulu, the man who was considered their king by the Zulu people, although the South African state never granted him that title. Edward, the Prince of Wales met him in June 1925 when he made a short trip to the small town of Eshowe, in (the former kingdom of) Zululand as part of his great African tour. 'King' Solomon was there to meet him, looking every inch a modern (African) monarch, with his pith helmet, his smart military accoutrements and his leopard skin draped on his shoulders pointing to his signalling of his Western and his African inheritances. The young poet and novelist William Plomer, who was then working in Eshowe, observed that the assembled Zulu regiments gave their own monarch such a show of welcome, that the king-in-waiting of the still largely intact British Empire was quite overshadowed (Plomer 151).

The thoughts, or memories, of the young Princess Magogo, who would surely have been present on that occasion, have not, as far as I am aware, ever been noted. Was she in the royal party? Possibly not. This was, to all intents and purposes a man's affair. The ideology of empire which so deeply embedded the unequal power relations of men and women did not easily allow women access to the

public sphere; moreover a collusion of patriarchal interests, those of the coloniser and the colonised, marked many of the social transactions of empire, in India, as Ania Loomba has pointed out (169), as well as in Africa. The collusion in this instance of colonised African men, in particular older men, with colonial patriarchy, has made it extremely difficult to extract evidence that there might at one time have been a more equal dispensation of power between the sexes. Any sense that women might at some time in the past have been proactive players in the Zulu polity, was not present in public accounts of 'Zuluness' at the time of the Eshowe gathering. In 1925, as the young Solomon kaDinuzulu, himself an embattled colonial subject, was struggling to wield together a new cohesion around a Zulu nationalism that embraced both elements of tradition and modernity — as his costume at Eshowe made clear — his sister, Constance Magogo, had already been promised in an important political marriage to the grandson of Mnyamana Buthelezi, in an attempt to heal a rift between two powerful groups in the old Zulu polity (see Marks 1986; Cope 1993). Her own feelings were put aside as she agreed to marry the man chosen for her by her brother. As she remarked in an interview in 1982, to Nicholas Cope and J.C. Dladla (with no trace of rancour recorded):

I had made my choice elsewhere. I was taken away from my fiancé by Solomon with his own hands. [She recounts how a number of the royal girls were called into the presence of Solomon and his councillors and asked to name their sweethearts. She does not name hers and instead is one of the group who agrees to 'put up our top knots' and so make it clear that they were eligible for marriage. She continues:] We three agreed, not knowing whether ... we would be given men with head rings, going grey. (Cope and Dladla 323, 324)

Instead she was given in marriage to Chief Mathole Buthelezi, who was of the same age group and the same regiment as her brother. She became his tenth wife (eventually the list of wives was twenty) and, later, mother of the boy who was to become Chief Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister for Home Affairs in the present South African Government, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, and a deeply controversial figure in South African politics since the late 1970s (see Maré and Hamilton 1987).

It would have been quite possible for Princess Magogo to have slipped into the anonymity that has marked the (non)identity of other twentieth-century, and late-nineteenth-century royal Zulu women and the wives of key traditional leaders, such as Mathole Buthelezi. However, the sheer power of her performative eloquence plus, perhaps, the influence of her son, ensured that her profile was different. The very hardships of her early life and the way in which they ensured that she was not plucked from the rich if fragmented idioms of a vernacular culture into the life of a member of the mission-educated elite, may have helped in the acquisition of her astonishing range of cultural repertoire and its historical depth. In the 1982 interview to which I refer earlier, the princess spoke briefly of the

unsettled and fear-filled early life which she and her two royal brothers endured after their father, Dinuzulu, had returned from exile on St Helena, to the humiliation of diminished status, an uncertain future and as 'chief' of a fraction of what was historically the old Zulu kingdom (see Guy 1982). The turmoil of her early years increased after the onset of the Bambatha rebellion in 1906 when Bambatha Zondi led a short but bloody uprising against colonial Natal. During that time, the three royal children (Solomon, her half-brother David and herself) were often moved secretly at night, and lived in constant fear of their lives. 'King' Dinuzulu was charged with conspiracy in the Bambatha rebellion in 1908, a charge he denied, but he was again sent into exile, this time to the Transvaal where he died in 1913 (Marks 1970, 303).

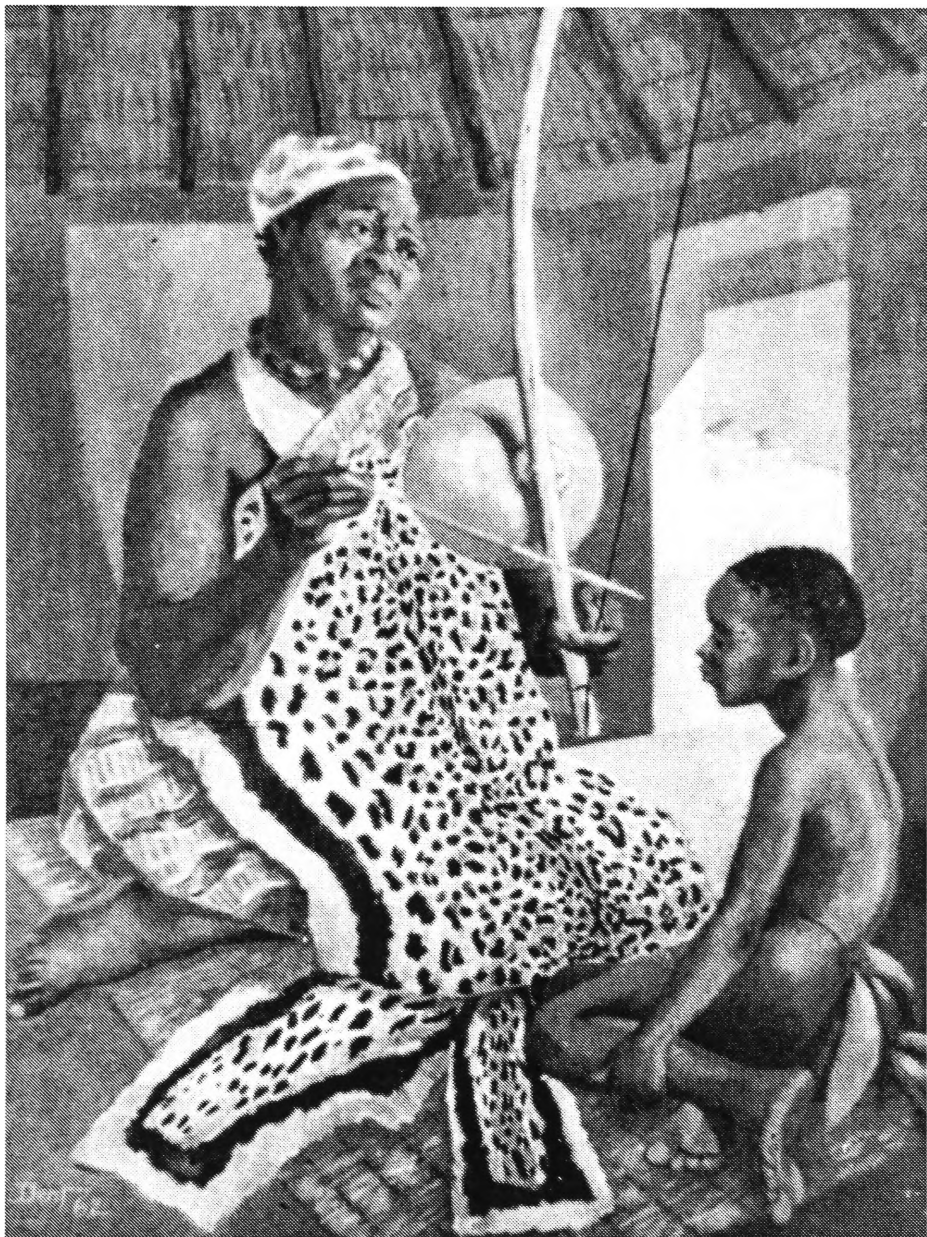
After the death of both her royal parents, it was her brother Solomon who tried to help supply her most basic needs. Princess Magogo's recollection of those early years conjures up images of danger and poverty:

I had no mother. I was troubled by many wives [of my father's], sixty-six of them. Solomon [would] go around pleading for me that they should sew up bad [seconds] yard goods for me to dress in.... He would go around people's homes and persuade the people to sew for his sister.... Oh, I know all about hardship. However it is good because it makes a person wise. (Cope and Dladla 323, 324)

Princess Magogo's troubled early life, and loss of her mother did not, ironically, isolate her from the company of other royal women, the mothers of her father Dinuzulu, and her many grandmothers, the widows of her grandfather, King Cetshwayo. It was in the company of these women — however difficult the proximity may have been at times — that Magogo absorbed the forms of cultural production that give such a deep insight into the complex subjectivities of Zulu women in the earlier precolonial and the colonial era. It is when the material disseminated by Magogo is put alongside other fragments of cultural insights, and asides, that a possible different reading of the balance of genders and their interaction in the articulation of Zulu culture begins to emerge.

* * *

I met Princess Magogo for the first time in February 1976 at the Buthelezi family home of KwaPhindangene (Come Back Again!) at Nkonjeni near Mahlabathini in northern KwaZulu. Then in her seventy-sixth year, she had a formidable reputation as a singer, poet and composer working within the poetic and musical frames of the forms she had absorbed from her girlhood onwards. I sat and rather tremblingly interviewed her, along with the three chief Buthelezi *izimbongi* (praise poets), Hezekiah and Nkomiyaphi Buthelezi and Mgezeni Ndlela, while her son, Chief Buthelezi, listened intently, made a few interjections and clearly enjoyed the occasion enormously (Gunner 1989, 12–37; Gunner and Gwala 88–97; 112–125). What emerged from the meeting was, firstly, the extent of her knowledge, and her active involvement in the broad range of sung and



Princess Constance Magogo kaDinuzulu playing the ugubhu, from the oil painting by H.R. Dent reproduced in Rycroft 1975a.

spoken forms that at one time comprised Zulu cultural production. It was also, a remarkably ungendered knowledge. She was supremely confident in her role as artist; she began by reciting the royal Zulu praises, *izibongo*, the poems which mark the careers and personalities of their bearers, and travel through time, carried

by those skilled in the rhetoric of the form, accessing social memory in a swift and powerful way, and evoking the past in the present (Cope 1968; Gunner 1984). The Buthelezi *izimbongi* listened respectfully as the princess recited the *izibongo* of the late-eighteenth-century figure, the Zulu leader, Senzangakhona kaJama, father of Shaka. It was clear that they knew they were in the presence of one at least as skilled as themselves in the difficult art of praising.

After her powerful rendition of the royal Zulu *izibongo*, the form of poetry so clearly linked in the public domain to political power and ideology, to lineage and to status, the princess turned to another area of the poetry of identity — royal women's praise poems. A few royal women's praise poems had been documented by the mid-1970s but they were clearly seen as belonging on the periphery of the royal praise poems. They were largely to be found tucked away in works such as Samuelson's *Long Long Ago*, where the *izibongo* of Zingelwayo, a mid-eighteenth-century figure, grandmother of Senzangakhona, are presented without any specific social or political context (Turner 1986; Coullie 1999). Mtoniya was: 'The She-Elephant who has her front covered with the paunch of a leopard/ While other married women have their front covered with the normal child-sling' (Samuelson 255).

Certainly, a number of early royal women were (as Mtoniya's *izibongo* imply), both powerful and formidable; Mnkabayi, aunt of Shaka, by whom people in the Zulu kingdom used to swear for some time after Shaka's death, and who had control of the Belebele regiment and the military base of the aQulusi, must rank among the best known of the early royal women, and her *izibongo* give a chilling sense of her powers: 'The Cunning One ... Morass of Menzi ... that caught people and finished them off' (Cope 1968, 179, 172–73). Royal mothers — or widows, in a number of cases — had control of important *amakhanda* (military bases). Mpikase, King Dingane's mother was in charge of the military base at Khangela (Cowley 51), while Queen Mkabi (born c.1760), the great wife (and widow) of Senzangakhona, had charge of the large Isiklebeni homestead, and was also in charge of Shaka's Jubingqwanga regiment at the same site (Cowley 83), and there were others. Yet in spite of their public status and responsibilities, the *izibongo* of such women (with the possible exception of Mnkabayi) were not recited in the grand arenas when *izimbongi* held centre stage at events such as the installation of royalty, or before battle, or at the visits by dignitaries of other nations, and so on.

What Princess Magogo presented, when she turned to the *izibongo* of royal wives and mothers, was not the grand stage on which public affairs were played out, the battles won, the lists of hapless victims which mark, for instance, the stirring and heroic *izibongo* of Shaka (Cope 1968, 88–117). Instead she presented elliptical sketches that caught the intricate minutiae of domestic and emotional life and at some points a finely tuned wit, turning on household matters. The genre was the same, but its execution and focus appeared to be different. Suddenly, out of the silence, came two cameos of the lives of nineteenth-century royal women.

With them, a whole area of Zulu cultural life, almost forgotten in the endless images of battle on which so much insider and outsider imaging of 'the Zulu' has focused, came into view. Ngqumbazi of the Zungu clan, mother of King Cetshwayo (and a wife of King Mpande), was caught by her contemporaries, circa 1845, in these allusive frames:

Close Peerer,
 Swallows' Clothes,
 The Needy One at the grain basket.
 She stints herself,
 She went even further and stinted the Royal One himself.
 Helper of those far away, the close at hand cry with her. (Gunner 1989, 28)

Ngqumbazi was, Princess Magogo explained, extremely tight-fisted with food and as a result everyone around her suffered, including 'the Royal One Himself'. She was also someone who felt the cold. Her personification as 'Swallows' clothes' had its genesis (we were told) in the fact that the queen liked to wrap herself up at all times, to keep warm. She wore a black shawl, and two of the corners would hang behind her like the forked tail of a swallow. The explanation, unfolding its 'secret joy' for those not in the inner circle of knowers, pointed up one of the key poetic features of Zulu sung and spoken genres, namely the aesthetics of allusion and the pleasure of tracking a metaphor to its referent that would often contain a kernel of narrative that tied into the community's social or historical life and its knowledge of itself.¹ Sometimes, too, a praise name can metonymically provide an insight into key components of social structure that are hard to discern in other ways. The reference to 'the grain basket', in an almost casual way, points to women's key role in pre-capitalist Nguni society as the producers of cereal, and of the production and reproduction of the household unit, even though their labour power, like their fertility, was ultimately controlled by men (Guy 1990, 35). It is even possible to see, in the laughing half-ironic reference to stinting 'even the Royal One himself', a recognition of this deeper social power which underpinned the social order even though women were subject to male control.

If such a poem, which circulated as part of a much wider body of sung and spoken poetry on the subject of identity, provided a glimpse of the daily private life of royalty and the deep axes of the society, the second set of *izibongo* that the princess recited had its own linked but different revelation. The *izibongo* for Nomvimbi Mzimela, mother of King Dinuzulu (and a wife of King Cetshwayo), composed most likely in the period immediately prior to the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, again focus on the fine-grained, revealing minutiae of domestic life, but in this case they also introduce the commonly used motifs (in women's praise poetry) of slander and victimisation. They also point up the struggle to survive as an individual by means of forging a poem as a verbal artefact of both defence and attack in the claustrophobic atmosphere of a large polygynous group:

The slandered one
 Slandered by men and women,
 Little wagon that is a nuisance to the [big] carriages
 The desired one she went on her wedding journey;
 The married women went [too], a bunch of conspirators. (Gunner 1989, 28)

Clearly, being known by such praise names which the speaker would use herself and by which she would be addressed, Nomvimbi, mother of the future king, was asserting *her* voice in the at times stifling surroundings of the women of the royal household.

That Princess Magogo's own mother (in the following generation) endured similar treatment from other domestic conspirators was demonstrated by the powerful memorial invective of another kind of praise poem — the praise names composed for an infant by its mother (known as *izangelo* (kisses) or *izibongo zengane*, the praise poem of infancy). The anger of her mother, Silomo Mdlalose, is caught in her poetic expose of the unnamed co-wives and their hateful behaviour to her:

... They plaited for me a rope of mutual disdain,
 All the royal household turned in disdain from me.
 I have come out with the great mother of the royal line.
 The day I walked out to the harvest gathering
 I was mocked by the vultures
 I was mocked by the cuckoo shrikes... (Gunner 1989, 33)

What the princess, effortlessly recalling her praise poem of infancy seventy-five years after its composition, was opening up to an astonished and fascinated outsider (myself), was the existence of a poetic tradition (both like and yet unlike the tradition of the big public praise poems) which allowed its practitioners freedom to compose verse that captured a personal angst, which drew on stark imagery from the natural world (the vultures and shrikes) in its close range verbal attack, and which would afford its composer psychological satisfaction. It would be constantly recited, for her child, the baby — the toddler — Magogo; it would, as poetry, afford its speaker complete immunity from the charge of insult or slander and it would, through performance, further the life of the art form so closely connected to the politics of polygynous domestic life. The poem would also become a mirror in which the child (the adult) saw an intimate portrait of her mother, linked always, through poetic words, to herself. In the *izangelo* the space of the narrowly domestic is set against that of agricultural labour, 'the harvest gathering', again pointing up women's role as grain producers, even though by 1900, when this would have been composed, the pre-colonial economy had been swept aside, the colonial hut tax had been in place since the 1880s, and the Zulu kingdom had been annexed by Natal and absorbed into the settler capitalist economy.

Although the praises of infancy (*izangelo*) that the princess herself composed in 1928 for her own infant son contain no reference to grain or harvest, they

continue the sense of the embattled position in a polygynous household that even the most 'privileged' of women experienced. The princess was, after all, one of twenty wives, even if her position as senior wife and mother of the future heir was assured. Images of poison and pollution dominate the first part of the praises, as dream and waking life merge:

I felt as I was sleeping that an otter squirted me.

I was pursued by another long trailing thing that would not remain

in the [cursed] forest of Sondaba. (Gunner 1989, 31)

The speaker then with great economy sketches in an impression of danger in landscape and of a lonely figure negotiating such danger. What is striking is the compact evocation of the range of landscape in which the speaker moves: she is pursued and then bitten by something like a (poisonous) mamba,

The one that lies in freshly burnt veld, where the mealie leaf does not disturb it...

I was struck down by a mamba there in the thick bush country.

And I was brought back to life by medicine from the lonely highveld.

(Gunner 1989, 31)

The allusion is to a journey the princess made when pregnant with her son, to a healer 'in the lonely highveld', in fact to a renowned healer and leader of an African independent church, Isaiah Shembe, when she was sure that she had been bewitched by a jealous co-wife. This form of poetry which can so powerfully and economically evoke pain and assertive response was meant not only to be heard but overheard, as its performance could take place even in the presence of those pointed out in the vituperative but protected, allusive mode of address that the poetry allowed.

Evidence of *izangelo* from the manuscripts of the linguist and collector of oral histories, James Stuart, who worked with Zulu historians and local intellectuals from the late nineteenth century to the early 1920s (Hamilton 1998), show with more detail how they operated alongside the other more public *izibongo*. They did not simply fade away but appear to have had a tenacious presence in men's lives in the domestic sphere. Long after childhood, they were used to mark moments of domestic intimacy in married life, when, for example, a man's wives would wish to thank him formally if a beast had been slaughtered. Thus this domestic rhetoric, the act of naming and identifying outside the public arena, was passed down from mothers to wives, and, in some cases, it would seem, carried on after death — as a kind of female form of rhetoric that constituted part of a genealogy of women's voices, making poetry, and making song. The *izangelo* were, perhaps, a way in which mothers and wives continued to 'write' their presence and their voice into the lives of sons and husbands even after their death. As the bard (*imbongi*), Mangothi, told James Stuart, 'My mothers still 'bonga (thank/praise) my father Godide by the praises given him by his mother, Memose, and yet he died years ago.² Recent path-breaking work on South African women's

songs by Deborah James (1999) and David Coplan (1996) has shown how genres either emerge and are carved out of former men's genres (James) or co-exist, somewhat on the edges of the men's genre (Coplan). However they relate to genres that may be more publicly accessible, they are extremely important as conduits of often, gendered, social consciousness, and of the making of meaning. In the case of the *izangelo* they constituted threads of continuity not only between generations of women, but also between women and men, perhaps, for men, undercutting the insistent and rigid constructions of masculinity imposed increasingly on them from the onset of the Shakan era.

* * *

However it was not only the praise songs of all but forgotten royal mothers that the young Princess Magogo heard and remembered when she lived in the company of the women of the royal household — women of different generations whose cumulative knowledge of forms of song and dance from the different regions of Zulu territory would have represented a dense and rich cultural archive. From one of King Cetshwayo's wives the princess learnt a love song which must have been one of many such songs, performed, like the *izangelo* or praise songs of infancy, to be overheard as well as listened to directly. The song, called simply, 'Nomagundwane' (Woman of the Rats) recalls, in the form of a miniature drama — which the listener/audience seems to be overhearing rather than listening to directly — the story of a lost love. Songs of loss and longing are a hallmark of the tradition of young women's songs, which are often accompanied by the single-stringed bow known as the *umakhweyane*, but as David Rycroft has pointed out, the length and intricate dramatic structure of 'Woman of the Rats' suggests that the form was capable of much greater variation and expression of psychological and emotional complexity than had been acknowledged either by cultural practitioners or critical commentators (Rycroft 1975, 62). The jilted girl addresses her sister, Nomagundwane, and tells her the story of how she visited her lover's family and was treated at first very politely but always with certain slights which, it became clear, were carrying an oblique message of dismissal, more from the lover's family, and particularly his mother, than from the young man himself. In fact the young man seems distinctly ill at ease with the treatment being meted out to the visitor and the favouritism shown to the second girl, called in the song, 'Miss Favourite'; but he seems unable to stop the flow of events. Although the song hints that it is the singer who spent the night with her lover, it is 'Miss Favourite' who is given the best blanket, the kiss from her 'mother', and who, on the following day, is not offered *amasi* by the household, a sure sign of marriage rejection. The narrating persona, on the other hand, is offered *amasi* and realises immediately that this is a sign that she must leave. The song of over 70 lines, transcribed by Rycroft, with its regular chorus of 'Mayebabo! (Alas!)' ends like this:

We entered the young men's hut.
 His sister came, bringing water;
 She went out again.
 She came in with some food, it was brought covered up;
 I started to uncover it;
 And I cried out: 'Oh, but it is thick milk!...[*amasi*]
 I came out crying: 'Now he has spurned me!'
 I cried: 'Woe, O my father! Today he has spurned me!'
 I cried out: 'Woe, O mountains! Now he has spurned me indeed!'
 Alas, O people! As for me, he has now spurned me!' (Rycroft 1964)

The near obsessive repeating of 'he has spurned me' — '*selingidumele*', gives the song great poignancy and illuminates the complex language of social signs by which people lived. The power of the whole song lies partly in the way in which it assumes a shared knowledge of the message so clearly yet so obliquely given. At the same time it gives the listener/reader entry into a young girl's personal experience of jilted love and thus shows its provenance as part of a much wider store of women's songs on the topic of love and loss.

The ballad-like 'Nomagundwane' was recorded by interested outsiders attempting to document and understand aspects of an indigenous South African musical tradition largely hidden from public view at a time of high apartheid when, on the one hand, indigenous cultures were seen by some anthropologists as existing in a kind of eternal ethnographic present, a view which the ideologues of apartheid keenly upheld. Another view of these 'timeless societies' was one that predicted that their cultural products would eventually fade away in the relentless march of modernity. Both views can be seen as deeply flawed. Transformation or mutation of genres and forms has in many cases taken place. Both Tracey and Rycroft have in the case of Princess Magogo's songs assisted in the process of change, as I will show. David Rycroft first recorded the ballad from the princess in 1964, and again (when she performed it with slight variations) in 1974; both Rycroft and the ethnomusicologist and broadcaster Hugh Tracey appear to have been fascinated by the store of musical knowledge to which the princess had access. What emerges both from the songs on the 1974 Gallo recording assembled by Tracey, and from an article on the 'Zulu Bow songs of Princess Magogo' which Rycroft published in 1975/6 is, again, an impression of the range of genres to which women had access and made good use of. The love songs are intense, passionate, elliptical and eloquent, as for example, the following which, like 'Nomagundwane', is intended for a solitary singer and perhaps a solitary listener, or no listener at all:

Helele, helele! Oh helele!
 He was handsome that boy, alas!
 O mother, O mother, O mother!
 Hold me my mothers, hold me!

When he looked at me, I loved him!
 When he laughed I loved him!...
 When he rode a horse he looked so fine!
 When he rode a brown he looked so fine!
 When he rode a white he looked so fine!
 When he rode a train he looked so fine!

Hold me, hold me, hold me. (Princess Magogo in Rycroft 1975/6, 49)

Another example, a song from the reign of King Mpande (1840–1872), shows that young women composed songs to compliment the regiments on their appearance when they came to the royal homestead. Yet another, counterpointing the passion of ‘Hold me my mothers!’, mocks a well-dressed young man, by pointing out that appearance is not everything. A further aspect of the way in which a song could be both a vehicle for difficult and complicated emotions, and a means of using such a moment to moralise and philosophise, is in the elliptical, ‘She was deceived by the burnt mountain’, which relates how two young women loved the same man — one became pregnant and aborted, the other was angry, mainly, it seems, because of the pregnancy, abortion and the publicity of the whole affair. The ‘burnt mountain’ becomes a metaphor for the dangerous pleasures of sexual intercourse outside marriage, and, the song states, its false sweetness (Tracey 1974). There are, though, songs of a wider, publicly political canvas. One such song is a protest song from a period in Zulu history when Shaka’s successor, his brother (and assassin), the unpopular King Dingane, victimised and killed many of his own subjects; in its compression and direct comment, it mirrors many later protest songs of the modern era, both in Zulu and in other South African languages. It states simply, but with the power of melody driving it: ‘Each day we are killed by Dingane’ (Tracey 1974).

A song showing the intertwining of personal and the public, again recorded by Tracey (and in print by Rycroft 1975/6), links politics and love, and was sung by the young women in love with Cetshwayo’s sons; they mourned the death of King Cetshwayo and set his sudden death at the door of his cousin and rival Zibhebhu. Yet other songs the princess recorded show her composing within the idioms available but moving out to embrace new topics. One such, was composed for Good Friday and Easter: ‘The stones broke open/ They said he was the King of Stones’ (Tracey 1974; Rycroft 1975/6, 90). The melody could have been one used for a love song, but instead it is an Easter hymn. Such imaginative cross-linking of cultural knowledge — the Christian story and the music of an indigenous tradition — has in other cases led to the creation of a body of dynamic, hybrid poetry in the hands of an African Church leader such as Isaiah Shembe (d.1935) (Gerard 1971; Muller 1999, Gunner 2002), or the early Xhosa prophet, Ntsikana, but Princess Magogo did not move beyond the single remarkable ‘King of Stones’. She was a baptised Anglican and may have felt that there was no place in her religious belief for her own compositions, but her skills as composer and performer

enabled her to range widely between compositions that embraced love, war, political commentary and domestic anxiety, and this would suggest that such a range was one that women did have access to, even if publicly their access was in general more circumscribed.

* * *

It is difficult to know whether Princess Magogo's position as an aristocrat gave her automatic rights over, and access to a wider body of song than other women would have had. Perhaps it was also her great talent that helped her range as widely as she did. Her power as a carrier and maker of poetic song was often proudly displayed by her son to foreign visitors (or white outsiders) to KwaPhindangene, in the 1960s and well into the 1970s, but it may not have been so easily available to her own people, and possibly, in her husband's lifetime (Chief Mathole died in 1959) her life as a composer and performer may have been one that was largely hidden from public view. The thirty-three years of her married life are not ones that — to my knowledge — she has commented upon publicly, and the vituperative vigour of her *izangelo* for her son suggest that her life as one of many wives in a competitive polygamous marriage would be far from easy. Mgezeni Ndlela, one of the Buthelezi *izimbongi* present at the 1976 meeting I had with the princess, recited the *izibongo* of her husband, Mathole kaTshanibezwe Buthelezi. Some of his praise-names, in the typically oblique yet penetrating way of such praise poetry, suggested that Mathole was a jealous man who could be violent to any man who might approach his wives, and a line of the *izibongo* warns of the dangers of 'firewater' (whisky). Place names which tie in to the history of the Buthelezi, and Chief Mathole's own history, mingle with attribute and personality in these coolly assessing, yet celebratory, *izibongo*:

Sudden-upshoot like the Buffalo River...

Concoctions of Firewater:

They are bitter, they will corrode the intestines — fatally.

Mamba that set up his homesteads

Between the Two-Seats Mountains

The Big One and the Little One...

Elephant who ate whilst trumpeting

At Mashonangashoni...

Mokomane, bird whose head is not eaten.

Swallower of both grog and blood.

He who chops off the penis-head there where lies the fatal source.

That is Mathole, son of Tshanibezwe. (Gunner and Gwala 1994, 125)

* * *

As a royal woman with privileged access to the more hegemonic form of public praise poetry as well as to the subaltern forms of women's poetry that I have touched on, and a composer in her own right, Princess Magogo was indeed

in a unique position. In the 1970s and early 1980s, her role as a gifted carrier of a rich heritage seems to have been increasingly acknowledged not only by her son but also by the radio station known as Radio Zulu, which was controlled by the Government and propagated the views of the apartheid state in its news and information broadcasts. One of her last public appearances may have been in 1979, five years before her death at the age of 84, when she performed the royal praises at a small official gathering in Durban, but there were other ways of publicising (and capitalising on) her cultural knowledge. Thus from the mid 1970s and into the 1980s, when the battle between the supporters of the still-banned African National Congress and those supporting the Inkatha Freedom Party raged in what was then Natal and the fragmented 'homeland' of KwaZulu (now the single province of KwaZulu-Natal), Radio Zulu played her songs with increasing frequency. Presumably the recordings were those from the Tracey-Gallo recording, and perhaps the less accessible Rycroft recording. No doubt, they were intended to be absorbed as part of a defiant cultural nationalism, counterpoised against a broader nationalist and pluralist discourse espoused by the follower of the banned African National Congress, and the United Democratic Front, but the songs were, in fact, largely the subaltern song of women. So these formerly muted stands of poetic and musical discourse were given public airings to its approximately three million urban and rural listeners. Singers, or prospective singers also heard them. The singer Tu Nokwe, as well as Sibongile Khumalo, who played the role of Princess Magogo in the opera, have both acknowledged the influence on them of Princess Magogo's songs heard on the air waves in these years.³ There are now a number of women's groups singing in the *maskanda* tradition (to which I referred earlier). They seem to have found a place for themselves alongside the hugely popular male singers such as the late Umfaz' Omnyama and Ihash' elimhlophe (White Horse). By doing so they may be engaging in a crucial kind of reclamation and reshaping of women's sung forms in contemporary culture. They are finding a place for themselves in a musical form, (claimed for a while solely by men in the urban space), which seems to have grown from the earlier women's genre of solitary love-singing exemplified by a song such as 'Helele, Hold me mothers!' A current song by the group Izingane zoMa (Mother's Little Ones) has as its main line, 'Granny, tell me, what's my surname?'.⁴ Certainly this is not about love, but loss, and is suggestive of the many kinds of social stress currently being experienced in the province.

* * *

But what of the opera, *Princess Magogo*? It was advertised on uKhozi FM, the renamed Zulu language radio station, operating as part of a vastly different, post-apartheid SABC, and it received considerable publicity on television and on the English-language station, SA-FM. On the first of its three nights it was attended only by invited celebrities, and was beamed live to a Chicago television station, and to viewers in Germany and the United Kingdom. On the second and third

nights the public came, and — on the night I was there — a mixed audience of English, Zulu and Afrikaans-speakers of all ages gave it a warm reception. It was an opera largely in Zulu, with snippets of English continuity (but not recitative), but it was certainly not attempting to inform opera with Zulu musical idioms. Five songs made famous by Princess Magogo are woven in to the performance which in terms of narrative structure works through flashbacks. As the opera opens with the dying princess on her bed, she sings the song of the young girls as they watched the regiments pass by; the sombre first act shows Magogo's father, Dinuzulu, courted by the eloquent Bambatha, resisting the attempts to be drawn into the Rebellion, but nevertheless arrested; later, the narrative turns to Princess Magogo's first love and we see her singing, 'Helele, Hold me mothers!'. This was hugely popular with the audience, who began to join in the 'Helele' refrain. We see her take the decision to renounce the man she loved and accept her brother's choice of a husband for her; and in one of the most moving scenes of the opera, the young Solomon and Magogo sing to each other with warmth and lyrical intimacy: he tells her that now he is to be 'king' he can really care for her and her days of hardship will be over (we have earlier seen, briefly, the taunting 'foster-mothers' who made her early life miserable).

As the opera moved to its close and the brilliantly clothed ancestors, resembling spectacular angelic figures, came to claim the princess and take her with them, one was left with the impression that the princess's life had been read in terms of a national script, an ambiguously national script that could be claimed by an audience seeing itself as South African rather than narrowly Zulu. I wonder how she wished to be seen? Biographies — and this opera was in some ways a biography — sometimes avoid untidinesses. In one of the interviews on the radio station, SA-FM, about his mother, in the days leading up to the opera, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi spoke of the enormous musical influence she had had on his life, and how she loved opera, and he mentioned her affection for — Rossini! Perhaps, then, there was something deeply fitting in presenting Princess Magogo through a musical medium that could resist any narrow essentialising, that gave a sense of the sweep of her life in a turbulent history, and its creative links both with the past and with many presents.

NOTES

- ¹ My ideas on the importance of allusion have been influenced by discussion at the Advanced Seminar on Reading Texts, held under the auspices of the Popular Literature in Africa Research Group, at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand, April 2002. Karin Barber's earlier work (Barber 1997) and her contribution at the seminar were particularly useful.
- ² James Stuart Archive, Notebook 76, Book of Eulogies 2, 48. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal, Durban.
- ³ My thanks to Laura Allan for information on this point in Johannesburg, 8 April, 2002.

- ⁴ Heard on Ukhozi-FM, mid-July, 2002.
- ⁵ Many thanks to my colleague Catherine Woeber for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of the essay, and also to Patricia Hayes and Wendy Woodward of the University of the Western Cape for their extensive comments on a very early version of this essay which I read at the Gender and Colonialism Conference at UWC in January 1997. My thanks also to John Wright for his helpful discussion on points of gender and Zulu history. Funding that helped in the preparation of this essay came from the 'Orality, Literacy and Colonialism' National Research Foundation group grant, and I wish to acknowledge its assistance here

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J.U. JACOBS

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: The Novel as *Umngqokolo*

In 1991, when the issue of *Kunapipi* on 'New Art and Literature from South Africa' appeared, Njabulo S Ndebele's complaint about the way in which black South African writing, committed to political engagement, had deteriorated into struggle allegory, was already a critical commonplace. South African fiction, Ndebele had said back in the 80s, was 'the product of an ideology whose analysis of society is based on moral premises' (23), and its characters consisted essentially of the stereotypical villains and victims of apartheid, impersonal ciphers in a moral debate. Formulaic rather than analytical, such novels had come to reproduce apartheid's negation of human individuality in a heroic narrative of 'numbing sensationalism' (24) and spectacle, requiring nothing beyond recognition. What was needed, Ndebele argued, was the rediscovery of the ordinary and the restoration of the truly human dimension to black South African storytelling.

Margaret Mervis has offered a persuasive reading of *Ways of Dying*, the first novel by the South African playwright, Zakes Mda, as a fictional exploration of 'new ideas and an alternative ideology through which he can envisage a place for himself and his art in the future' (42). She develops the thesis that in a narrative 'combination of Brechtian didacticism and indigenous African participatory storytelling' (55), Mda has succeeded in translating his theories of 'Theatre for Development' (Mda 1993) into what she calls 'Fiction for Development', a new kind of text informed by a humanistic ethos.

This essay, however, will attempt to show how, in his third and most recent novel, *The Heart of Redness*, Mda has responded to Ndebele's challenge by addressing the present history of South Africa in regional terms rather than those of national allegory, and in a narrative that draws on distinctive cultural practice and a particular event from the South African past to structure its concern with contemporary realities. *The Heart of Redness* not only graphically represents the formal and informal occasions by means of which a culture enacts both its perpetuation of ancient traditions and its engagement with present circumstances, but the text itself is also a *performative* one. *The Heart of Redness* bears out David Coplan's observation that, 'The importance of expression in action, of making meaning visible, has been documented in genres of dance, oral poetry, and narrative throughout black South Africa' (1). *The Heart of Redness* depicts the cultural traditions and performances of the amaXhosa, and the way in which the narrative also observes their cultural protocols in the telling makes the text in

a crucial way analogous to the narrative art of traditional African storytelling. 'The storyteller', Harold Scheub says in his book, *The Tongue is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid*, 'orchestrates images, joining the imaginative image of the storytelling tradition and the imagination of the performer to the fact of the historian' (53). It is in this storytelling convention, this essay will argue, that Mda can also be seen to operate: valuing tradition while also manipulating it to shape the present. At the heart of oral performance in South Africa, Scheub has demonstrated, lies a recognition of the reciprocal relationship between the past and the present. As he explains it:

Storytellers, and this includes the poets and the historians in the oral tradition, fuse idea and emotion into story, and in that interchange audience members are wedded to the past, as a significant exchange occurs: the past influences and shapes the experience of the present, at the same time that the experience of the present determines what of the past is useful and meaningful today. (xv)

* * * *

In *The Heart of Redness*, the protagonist, Camagu, has never before heard singing like that of the young Xhosa girl, Qukezwa:

She bursts into a song and plays her umrhubhe musical instrument. She whistles and sings all at the same time. *Many voices come from her mouth*. Deep sounds that echo like the night. Sounds that have the heaviness of a steamy summer night. Flaming sounds that crackle like a veld fire. Light sounds that float like flakes of snow on top of the Amathole Mountains. Hollow sounds like laughing mountains. *Coming out all at once*. As if a whole choir lives in her mouth. (Mda 175) [emphasis added]

When he later again hears her 'song of many voices' (316) — or 'split-tone singing' as it is referred to in the novel — he tries to describe the extraordinary range of vocal colour:

Qukezwa sings in such beautiful colours. Soft colours like the ochre of yellow gullies. Reassuring colours of the earth. Red. Hot colours like blazing fire. Deep blue. Deep green. Colours of the valleys and the ocean. Cool colours like the rain of summer sliding down a pair of naked bodies.

She sings in soft pastel colours, this Qukezwa. In crude and glaring colours. And in bright glossy colours. In subdued colours of the newly turned fields. *All at the same time*. (223) [emphasis added]

The amaXhosa, the southernmost Bantu-speaking people in South Africa, inherited much of their music culture, together with the click consonants of their language, from the KhoiSan with whom they had particularly close contact. The ethnomusicologist, David Dargie, to whom I am greatly indebted for all my information about Xhosa music, suggests that 'Thembu overtone singing' — as it is more accurately called — 'was also inherited from the San' (Dargie 1993, 1–2). Thembu Xhosa music is especially noted, Dargie says, for its marvellous

techniques: 'musical bows gently singing out melody and rich harmony through overtone patterns, the proliferation of song parts as singers build their harmony and polyphony on the bow sounds, the almost unbelievable complexity of the rhythms, and the strange and wonderful Thembu practices of overtone singing — apparently the only examples of the technique in African traditional music'. (Dargie 1994, 1)

The Xhosa use two main kinds of musical bow: the *uhadi*, which is a gourd-resonated percussion bow, and the *umrhubhe*, which is a mouth-resonated friction bow (Dargie 1993, 2). The *umrhubhe*, with which Qukezwa is singing in the first extract I quoted from the novel, is played by bowing the wire string with a scraped stick or reed:

One hand holds the bow at its further end, holding the near end against the side of the mouth. The string is stopped with either the thumb-nail or the middle finger of the hand holding the bow. The other hand holds the *umcinga*, bowing it against the string.... The player amplifies the melody overtones by shaping the mouth, the bow stick pressing firmly through the cheek against the teeth.... The player may also whistle out of the side of the mouth, while continuing to bow the string. The technique then is to play the leader part using overtones, and play the follower parts using both overtones and whistling'. (Dargie 1994, 9)

All Xhosa bow-playing, Dargie explains, is based on the same bow theory:

The bow is conceived as a quasi-person playing the same role in a song as a singer, mostly as the song-leader, but also as a song-follower. Bows play the *izicabo* [text-lines] of the song ... and only by implication the melody lines of the singer(s). These melodies grow out of the speech-tone — both sentence tone and word tone. And they are realised using a hexatonic scale derived from bow-theory. Unaccompanied Xhosa singing also draws heavily on bow theory. The bows produce major triads by using overtones of the fundamentals of the single string, one fundamental using the open string, and one a whole tone higher produced by stopping the string.... The aim of the bow player is to follow melody; but because of the bow fundamental-overtone system, this necessarily implies a constant use of harmony, according to the pattern of tonality shift required by the song.... From these constant patterns of harmony the Xhosa have developed very rich techniques of harmony and polyphony. (Dargie 1993, 3–4)

Dargie quotes a saying that the Xhosa people, 'like to put salt into their songs' (1994 1). Never content just to sing a song straight, they give it zest by adding more and more parts to it, 'overlapping parts, harmony parts'. To perform one rhythm at a time is not enough: 'the melody must have its rhythm, and the body movement/clap must have another which fits against it, even though quite different' (2). Similarly, it is not sufficient for some people just to play a single melody on the *umrhubhe*: 'using the overtones, they play the melodies of the leading singer, and then at the same time they whistle the melodies of answering singers. Some people are not content just to sing one melody at a time — using the techniques of *umngqokolo* overtone singing ... many ... can sing more than one note at the same time' (Dargie 1994, 2).

Umngqokolo literally means 'rough noise'. Dargie points out how, whereas 'bows are personified in song performance' (1993 4), this procedure is reversed in *umngqokolo* overtone singing:

Now it is the singer who attempts to reproduce the bows' method of following the *izicabo* of the song. As with the bow player, the chief aim of the *umngqokolo* overtone singer is to produce melody. In 'ordinary' *umngqokolo*, the singer — always a woman or girl — artificially forces the voice down into the bass register. As with all overtone singing, the nasal passages must be kept open as a supplementary cavity to enhance the mouth cavity. The forced bass fundamental, very rough in tone, is well suited to the production of overtones. The singer lifts the tip of the tongue over the teeth, holding the lips in a position as when pronouncing the vowel *u* as in *ululate*, but with the lips thrust out a bit more than normal. The tongue touches the inside of the under lip. By lifting and lowering the tongue slightly, by shaping it and by shaping the lips, the singer is able to resonate chosen overtones of each particular fundamental tone.... The shift from one 'ordinary' *umngqokolo* overtone to the other may be very rapid, so that at first hearing one may only notice the deep, gruff pattern of three or four note bass melody. The overtones are relatively faint, but nevertheless clear. Because of this close relation of fundamentals and melody tones, the overtone singing fits perfectly into the harmony patterns of bow and singers using normal voice. From a distance the overtone singer, once she has got her music going well, sounds not unlike an *umrhubhe* being well played'. (Dargie 1993, 4–5)

In *umngqokolo ngomqangi* the voice deliberately imitates the *umrhubhe* bow (*umqangi* is an old name for the *umrhubhe*). The technique, Dargie explains, 'is similar to that used for 'ordinary' *umngqokolo*, except that now the tongue is kept flat in the mouth.... But now the overtones are very loud and clear, of a similar volume to the fundamental tones, which are themselves rather less rough in tone than in normal *umngqokolo*' — and only two fundamentals are used, a whole tone apart (Dargie 1993, 7).

Stylistically, *umngqokolo* overtone singing has its roots in KhoiSan culture. In *The Heart of Redness*, Qukezwa's Khoikhoi ancestor, also Qukezwa, for whom she is named, prays to Tsiqwa, 'Father of fathers' who created the Khoikhoi and all the world. The epithet by which he is known, she explains, is 'the one who tells his stories in heaven' (Mda 23). In *The Heart of Redness* Zakes Mda traces his own art of storytelling back to Tsiqwa, Creator and source of all narrative. In Mda's second novel, *She Plays with the Darkness*, the narrative not only describes the traditional songs and dances of the Basotho, but the text itself is also a performative one in so far as the overall narrative rhythm derives from a complex pattern of repetition and variation by means of which Mda consciously manipulates the modes and images of the past in relation to the unfolding history of modern Lesotho (see Jacobs). In *The Heart of Redness* he once again turns to traditional performance to mediate a culture in the process of transition and renewal, but his focus is now on Xhosa culture in the context of contemporary South Africa, and his fictional mode is more complex and also more accomplished. *The Heart of*

Redness may best be approached, I suggest, as the fictional equivalent of Xhosa overtone singing — in effect, an *umngqokolo* narrative.

To borrow the saying quoted earlier, Mda ‘puts salt into his narrative’ in various ways, beginning with its overt intertextuality. The theory of intertextuality says that a text ‘cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and does not function as a closed system’ (Worton and Still 1). First, writers are themselves readers of texts before they are creators of texts, and therefore their works are ‘inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind’; and secondly, readers in turn bring a background of other texts to their reading of any particular text. Both kinds of intertextuality that Michael Riffaterre distinguishes apply to *The Heart of Redness*: ‘*aleatory* intertextuality ... which allows the reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts’, and ‘*obligatory* intertextuality which demands that the reader take account of a hypogrammatic origin’ (Worton and Still 26). To begin with the latter, in his Dedication Mda expressly acknowledges his indebtedness to J.J. Peires’s book, *The Dead Will Arise*, as his main source of information and inspiration for the history of the prophetess Nongqawuse and the great Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856–57. In addition to this obligatory historical intertext, the obvious allusion to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in the title of Mda’s novel requires that its presentation and analysis of nineteenth-century British colonialism as well as the impact of globalisation in present-day South Africa also be read in the light of Conrad’s canonical fictional treatment of European colonialism in Africa. The genealogical tree of the Xhosa ‘descendents of the headless ancestor’ that Mda provides at the beginning of the novel, invites one to consider it as a South African offshoot of Gabriel García Márquez’s magic realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, with its similarly twinned and recurrent family names and characteristics. Closer to home, Zoë Wicomb’s novel, *David’s Story*, also published in 2000, might also serve as an aleatory South African intertext with its comparable genealogical tree setting out the aboriginal Griqua ancestry of the protagonist, David Dirkse, a former MK soldier trying to get his story told in the new South Africa. Various voices may be heard together contributing to the narrative in Mda’s novel in a cultivated polyphony that draws the reader’s attention to textual functioning as well as simply to hermeneutics (see Worton and Still 11).

An obvious split-tone aspect of the narrative in *The Heart of Redness* is its *palimpsest* structure, to use Gérard Genette’s term for intertextuality. At the fundamental level of the 1856–57 narrative, the story of Nongqawuse’s prophecies about the resurrection of the new people in Xhosaland, the conflict between the Believers and the Unbelievers over the cattle-killing, and the ensuing starvation, provides a *hypotext*: a tragic history of rebirth foretold but devastation and death realised. Over this historical narrative is inscribed a fictional *hypertext*, more comic in tone, and set in 1998 in the coastal village of Qolorha-by-Sea in the Eastern Cape, close to the mouth of the Gxarha River where Nongqawuse had

her visions one hundred and forty-odd years earlier. The main conflict in this 1998 chronotope is, however, between latter-day Believers and Unbelievers, descendents of the original two factions, but now divided about the imperatives for cultural change in the overall intellectual climate of African Renaissance in South Africa today. The tonally distinct contemporary narrative enhances, offsets and comments on the fundamental narrative about religious and political visionaries, their followers and their detractors.

Another obvious split-tone aspect of the narrative is its diglossic character. The many Xhosa words and expressions that are introduced and translated in the text provide a virtual directory of Xhosa culture, reminding the reader at the same time that the speech world of this English-language text is a southern Nguni one. Social positions and gender roles are defined in isiXhosa terms: *xhego* (an old man); *amabhinqa* (women); *makoti* (a daughter-in-law); *intombi* (a young woman); *umfana* (a young man); *kwedini* (a stupid boy). Formal institutions such as *imbhizo* (a public meeting) or *inkundla* (the court of the chief) are featured, as well as less formal but nonetheless established practices such as *ukukrexexa* (having lovers outside marriage). Xhosa traditional dress is described in detail: the *amahomba* (those who look beautiful and pride themselves in fashion) with their *iqhiya* (turban), *isikhakha* (red-ochred dress) with its *umbhaco* (black strip decorations), their beads, the square *amatikiti*, multi-coloured *uphalaza* and *icangci*, and *amacici* beaded earrings. Traditional foods are carefully distinguished: *umphokoqo* (maize porridge that is specially eaten with sour milk); *inqodi* (fermented sorghum soft-porridge); *amarhewu* (fermented maize soft-porridge); and shellfish such as *imbhatyisa* (oysters), *imbhaza* (mussels), *amangquba* (abalone) and *amaqonga* (varieties of abalone that look like large snails). The vernacular names for various trees are given, such as *usundu* palms, the *umsintsi* or coral tree, the *ikhamanga*, or wild banana, and the common *umga*, or mimosa tree; and different species of birds are identified, also according to their symbolic significance: from the *amahobohobo* (weaverbirds), *uxomoyi* (giant kingfisher) and *ing'ang'ane* (haded a ibis), to *uthekwane*, the brown hammerhead bird that can call down lightning, and *isomi*, the red-winged starling, a holy bird which it is a sin to kill. Cultural rituals are recorded, such as the circumcision rites involving *abakhwetha* (the initiates), *amakhankatha* (the men who teach the initiates how to be men), and the *ingcibi* (the doctor who cuts the foreskin), and ceremonies such as *isizathu* (the ceremony for the dead that is held some months after the death). Various aspects of the Xhosa belief system feature in the novel: *igqirha* (the healer and diviner), *ubuthi* (witchcraft or evil charms), *iqungu* (the vengeful force generated by war medicines), *imilozi* (whistles that are the language of the spirits), *isivivane* (the stone cairns that mark the graves of ancestors), and rituals such as the *ukurhuda* in which sacred enemas and emetics are administered. And in addition to the overtone singing, a range of other Xhosa songs and dances are also described: *amagqiyazana* (the dance of the young girls who have not yet reached puberty),

umxhentso (the dance by men and women together in memory of the dead), *tyityimba* (a dance which involves shaking the upper body), *umbhorotho* (bridesmaids' songs), *izitibiri* (also known as sounds), the *umtshotsho* song, and the ululation of the *abayiyizeli*.

What makes all this cultural information more than just ethnography is the way it is contained in the dialectic between, on the one hand, *ubuqaba* (backwardness and heathenism) and, on the other, *ubugqobokha* (enlightenment and civilisation). Backwardness and enlightenment, and traditional belief and skepticism, are contrasted and relativised in both main narrative periods of the novel. The feuding fictional community of Believers and Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-Sea at the turn of the millennium are the descendents of the Middle Generation, as those who suffered under apartheid are referred to in the novel, and who in turn inherited from their nineteenth-century forebears a world massively damaged by a combination of colonialism and their own creeds. Both the 1856 and 1998 narratives are coded in terms of ambivalence and cultural heterogeneity that resonates back and forth between the past and the present.

The underlying story of the Xhosa cattle-killing in 1856 is constructed around representative twin sons of the Xhosa patriarch, Xixika, a patrician of the Great Place of King Sarhili. Twin-Twin, first-born yet paradoxically, according to Xhosa custom, regarded as the younger brother, is a lover of women, husband of numerous wives and father of many children; Twin, the second-born but 'older' brother, is the monogamous husband of the Khoikhoi woman, Qukezwa, who had prostituted herself to the British soldiers in order to steal their gunpowder during the colonial war against the prophet Mlanjeni from 1850–1853. Their only child, Heitsi, is named for the Khoikhoi prophet and saviour, Heitsi Eibib, son of Tsiqwa, and is the bearer of the ancient traditions of both the Xhosa and the Khoikhoi.

The fictional narrative follows the main contours of the historical one very closely, beginning with the three-year-long war waged against the Xhosas by their self-styled 'Great White Chief', the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Harry Smith, and continued under his successor, Sir George Cathcart. Not only does the novel quote Smith's instruction to his field commanders to 'exterminate the savage beasts!' (Mda 2000, 20; see Peires 1989, 12: 'to destroy and exterminate these most barbarous and treacherous savages'), almost in anticipation of Conrad's Kurtz, but the notion of savagery is further relativised by the inclusion in Mda's narrative of the Xhosa practice of disembowelling slain British soldiers to render their witchcraft powerless as well as the British practice of decapitating slain Xhosas and boiling down their skulls in the Victorian spirit of '[s]cientific enquiry' (Mda 21). As Peires expresses it: 'Atrocities breed atrocities, and it would be wrong for the historian to pass judgement on those who killed and tortured in this most merciless of all frontier wars' (Peires 23).

The cultural hybridity embodied in the young Heitsi is a metonymy of the cultural hybridity, political compromise and religious syncretism that is thematised

in Mda's novel and also analysed in Peires's history of the period. Peires points out that the Xhosa people's struggling to come to terms with a new conception of death after the terrible smallpox epidemic of 1770 had provided a favourable context for the Christian message of the resurrection. The lineage of Xhosa prophets in the nineteenth century 'whose doctrines were explicitly derived from Christianity' (Peires 32) began with Ntsikana, who 'preached a gospel of peace and praise' (33) and predicted the coming of the white man, and Nxele, who renounced mission Christianity and evolved a new theology that amalgamated the chief elements of the Christian and Xhosa religions — in the words of Mda's novel, he fired the Xhosa imagination with his revelations concerning 'Mdalidephu the god of the black man, Thixo the God of the white man, and Thixo's son, Tayi, who was killed by the white people' (Mda 14). Strains of both religious discourses might have filtered through the prophecies of Mlanjeni, the Riverman of the Keiskamma River, who venerated the sun and exhorted the Xhosa to purify themselves and cleanse the drought-stricken earth by rejecting all witchcraft and slaughtering all their dun and yellow-coloured cattle — which the settlers feared was because dun was the colour associated with them.

Ntsikana and Nxele were obvious precursors, however, of the prophet Mhlakaza, who most clearly embodied the syncretism of Christianity and Xhosa religion and whose religious obsessions prepared the way for the later, more far-reaching prophecies of Nongqawuse. After his father had killed his mother, Mhlakaza had come to the Cape Colony, adopted Christianity together with the name Wilhelm Goliath, and was baptised in the Methodist Church. When he met Nathaniel Merriman, the Anglican Archdeacon of Grahamstown, Goliath joined the Anglicans, boasting that he was 'the first umXhosa ever to receive the Anglican Communion' (Mda 53). He regarded himself as a Gospel Man — as he is described in Mda's novel: 'He could recite the Creed, all Ten Commandments in their proper order, and the Lord's Prayer. He spoke the language of the Dutch people too, as if he was one of them' (53). Finding himself treated as a servant by the Merrimans, however, he left in 1853 to go and live on the Gxarha River just beyond the borders of British Kaffraria, resumed his own name of Mhlakaza, and — in the words of Peires, 'within a few years ... began to preach a new Gospel of his own devising which was to succeed — and to fail — beyond his wildest dreams' (Peires 36).

Mda's novel traces the syncretistic religious strain through Mhlakaza to his fifteen-year-old orphan niece, Nongqawuse, who claimed to have seen spirits ('Strangers' as she called them) in the bush and in the sea. In her words: 'They said they were messengers of Naphakade, He-Who-Is-Forever, the descendant of Sifuba-Sibanzi, the Broad-Chested One' (Mda 59). People were confused about this: 'They had not heard of He-Who-Is-Forever, nor of the Broad-Chested-One. Obviously these must be the new names of the god of the amaXhosa people ... the one who is known by everyone as Qamata or Mvelingqangi ... the one who was called Mdalidephu by Prophet Nxele' (59). Peires emphasises the fusion of

Christian and Xhosa components in the identity of these spirit-messengers: the Christian dichotomy between God and Christ is reflected in the two figures of Naphakade and Sifuba-Sibanzi, but although Sifuba-Sibanzi, in the tradition of heroic apostrophe, 'is today a universally recognised praise name for Jesus Christ', it was also 'originally a Khoi name for God' (Peires 137).

Mhlakaza's blend of Christianity and Xhosa belief also informed the 'Strangers'' visionary message, with its combination of apocalypse and resurrection: they instructed the Xhosa nation to slaughter all their cattle and destroy their corn because they had been contaminated by witchcraft. They were to abjure all forms of witchcraft, and they were not to cultivate their fields in the new season, but dig new grain pits, erect new cattle kraals, build new houses and wear new ornaments 'to greet a new and perfect world' (Peires 311). The whole community of the dead — the ancestors — were preparing to rise again, as well new cattle, and new corn would miraculously appear. 'On the appointed day, the sun would rise blood-red with a terrible heat, until it turned back at midday to set again, turning the earth pitch-black' (Peires 311–12). After a terrible storm in which the unbelievers, their impure cattle and their witchcraft would be destroyed, the new people, the new cattle and the new corn would rise again.

Mda's novel plots the ensuing drama of division, equivocation and prevarication in terms of the lives of Twin and Twin-Twin. Despite — and because of — King Sarhili's confirming that he too has seen and spoken to the spirit messengers and been given a glimpse of his dead son on the waves in the distance, the Xhosa people split into two factions: the Believers, or amaThamba — 'those whose hearts [are] soft and compassionate' and who uphold the common good (Mda 98; see also Peires 175–77) — and the Unbelievers, amaGogotya — 'the hard ones' (Mda 98), who are ruled by greedy self-interest. True to the historical facts, Mda's novel does not essentialise either the Believers or the Unbelievers. Peires argues that neither the Xhosas' loss of land in the Frontier Wars and their subsequent attitudes towards the colonial government, nor their adherence to their precolonial beliefs or conversion to Christianity, were *per se* determining factors in their participation in the Cattle-Killing movement (see Peires 1989, 165ff). In Mda's novel there are both Believers as well as Unbelievers who believe in 'Qamata, the god of the amaXhosa', as there are those from both groups who believe in 'Thixo, the god of the white man' (Mda 129). The cattle lung sickness epidemic that had ravaged Xhosaland in 1854–55 might have suggested cattle-killing to the Xhosa, Peires says, but this alone 'cannot account for the pattern of division between believer and unbeliever' (Peires 1989, 168). Twin-Twin's unbelief causes him to sink 'deeper into collaboration with the conquerors of his people' (Mda 2000, 53). His unwavering rejection of Nongqawuse's prophecies and of the cattle-killing brings him paradoxically into alliance with Xhosa chiefs who have deserted their own gods for Christianity and been seduced by Sir George Grey's brand of colonialism with its promise of schools and hospitals. Families

are split apart as rifts grow between fathers and sons, husbands and wives. When Twin-Twin's senior wife eventually runs away to join the Believers on the banks of the Gxarha River he is devastated, as he is when his own brother, Twin, leads a party of Believers who burn down his homestead.

The plight of the Believers is presented from the perspectives of Twin and his wife, Qukezwa. In them can be seen the complex operation of belief on the one hand, and on the other, frustration at colonial domination and the hope that the settlers would also be swept away when the new people arrived. Together with Twin and Qukezwa the reader experiences the First Disappointment when the first date of the resurrection set by the prophets, the full moon of June 1856, comes and goes like any other day. And the Second Disappointment at the next full moon in mid-August when, instead of two suns rising as the prophets now promise, a 'solitary sun ... walk[s] across the sky as if it [is] just another day' (150). Like the Unbelievers, the Believers are not a homogeneous group, but become divided between the followers of Nongqawuse and the followers of Nonkosi, the eleven-year-old daughter of the traditional healer, Kulwana, who begins prophesying on the banks of the Mpongo River. The failure of the new people and cattle to materialise is attributed at first to the only partial obedience to the cattle-killing command by the Believers, and then to the disobedience of the Unbelievers and their betrayal of the Xhosa nation. The further postponement of the promised arrival on the full moon of January 1857 to mid-February makes belief all the more urgent as starvation bites in, the country is filled with the stench of rotting carcasses, and angry resentment against the Unbelievers grows. The long-awaited 16 February 1857 dawns, but turns out to be the day of the Great Disappointment. In the words of the novel:

The sun rose. It was not the colour of blood. It looked like any other sun. It did not rise late either. The Believers watched it in disbelief as it moved across the sky. There was no darkness. No thunder. No lightning. The dead did not arise. (242).

A general fury erupts against the Unbelievers as people die in their thousands, and corpses and skeletons become a common sight in the veld and around homesteads in what the narrative describes as 'a dog-eat-dog world' (292). The story of the Cattle-Killing ends with the starving survivors of the Xhosa having to cast themselves on the arbitrary charity of Sir George Grey, and being forced from their land to work for white settlers. Twin dies raving mad from starvation in the Kaffir Relief House; Qukezwa wanders from village to village begging for scraps of food. By the end of 1857, approximately 40,000 Xhosa people had starved to death — an estimated four per homestead — and upwards of 150,000 more were displaced. An estimated 400,000 head of cattle had been slaughtered by January 1857. More than 600,000 acres of land were subsequently lost by the Xhosa (see Peires 1989, 319).

The 1998 narrative in Mda's split-tone text provides an elaborate interchange with the story of the Cattle-Killing, with its own version of the nineteenth-century

conflict between amaThamba and amaGogotya, and between *ubuqaba*, backwardness — or 'redness' for the red ochre with which the women smear their bodies and dye their skirts — and *ubugqobokha*, moving forward with the times. The feud between Believers and Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-Sea sometimes leads, at other times follows, and often overlaps with the Nongqawuse narrative. The narrative polyphony is further enriched by the Xhosa cultural world of the 1998 chronotope being presented as complex as the nineteenth-century one.

The protagonist, Camagu, returns to South Africa in 1994 after thirty years in the United States, only to find himself one of the 'disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of this new society' (Mda 28). He loses his enthusiasm for this newly democratic society when he realises that he lacks the struggle credentials to be admitted to its inner circles. In Mda's novel the new African Renaissance is as compromised a creed as Nongqawuse's prophecy of the rebirth of the new people. The ruling elite — the latter-day chiefs of the nation — Camagu discovers, consists of the 'Aristocrats of the Revolution' (36); networking, lobbying, nepotism and racial tokenism might secure employment, not his American doctorate in communication and development; black empowerment means the enrichment of a chosen few, an elite clique of black businessmen, trade union leaders and corrupt politicians.

For all its picturesqueness, the fictional — like the actual — Eastern Cape village of Qolorha-by-Sea to which Camagu comes in search of the beautiful young Xhosa girl he heard singing at a funeral on the roof of a Johannesburg building, is situated in the province with 'the worst levels of poverty, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, infrastructure, services and skills ... in the country' (waga Mage 11). True democracy is no more readily available to these people than running water or electricity.

Camagu is both observer and mediator of the conflict led by the elderly councillor, the widowed Zim, spokesman for the Believing faction and champion of traditional Xhosa values and practices, and his counterpart, Bhonco, representing the case of the Unbelievers in favour of development and progress. However, although Camagu tries 'to observe the patterns of believing and unbelieving at this village, to try to make sense of them ... they remain beyond his comprehension' (Mda 105). The Unbelievers are deeply embarrassed by the history and legacy of Nongqawuse and prefer to suppress it, whereas the family of Believers and their followers are proud of her heritage and of her Pool nearby. The antagonists and other principal actors in this cultural drama cannot be easily categorised, however. Zim's traditionalism is supported by his monthly government pension, while NoPetticoat, wife of the enlightened Bhonco, matches her husband's rival in her preference for traditional Xhosa costume. The close identification of Zim's daughter, Qukezwa, with Nongqawuse, and her overtone singing while riding her horse, Gxagxa — an experience which excites the hapless Camagu to involuntary orgasm — has to be modified by the Pierre Cardin logo on her cap. Similarly, the

enthusiasm that Bhonco's daughter, the headmistress Xoliswa Ximiya, expresses for all things Western has to be seen in the light of her cultural icons, Dolly Parton and Eddy Murphy, and to offset and match this cultural hybridity the trading store owner, Dalton, may look 'like a parody of an Afrikaner farmer' (7), but is in fact the grandson of an English missionary and great-great-grandson of a frontier magistrate in the days of Nongqawuse. Not only does he speak better isiXhosa than most people in the village, but he has also gone to the initiation school and 'been circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people' (7).

The debate about bringing progress to Qolorha is conducted around the plans of a big company to build a casino and resort hotel on the Gxarha River mouth and so attract tourists from all over the world. Set against the Unbelievers' support of this visionary project is the modest exercise in cultural tourism by some of the village women, which offends Xoliswa Ximiya since 'her people are made to act like buffoons for ... white tourists' (110). The conflict intensifies as a parodied inversion of the nineteenth-century conflict between the Unbelievers and the Believers, again between the 'soft' people whose concern is for the wellbeing of the community and the 'hard' people who interpret profit as progress. An international-style gambling resort would marginalise and exclude the local people; alternatively, a cultural village would misrepresent their actual daily lives. The outcome is victory for neither the Believers nor the Unbelievers: the conflict leads to Nongqawuse's Pool being declared a national heritage site, and instead of the 'wonderful gambling city [rising] in all its crystal splendour and glory' (310), the villagers run a co-operatively owned holiday camp.

The Heart of Redness succeeds in imaginatively expanding and focusing the overtones of its nineteenth-century historical discourse into a fictional narrative; it also succeeds in developing the realism of its late-twentieth century fictional discourse into a uniquely South African — or more correctly Xhosa — kind of magical realism with oral undertones. In this hybrid text, Camagu recognises his amaMpondomise clan totem in a brown mole snake that he finds in his bed; Qukezwa, with whom he falls in love, becomes pregnant, despite the grandmothers confirming her virginity, and gives birth to a son she calls Heitsi; Bhonco engages a group of ululants to torment Zim, who retaliates by sending hadeda birds to laugh at him; NomaRussia, stricken with cervical cancer, waits in vigil outside Zim's hut for him to die and in the world of the ancestors intercede with his wife, NoEngland, who has preceded him there, to remove the witchcraft that has caused her haemorrhaging.

The novel ends with separate episodes from the two time periods merging: in the 1857 narrative, Twin's wife, Qukezwa, is next to the lagoon with her son, Heitsi, and singing 'in split tones'. 'She sings in glaring colours. In violent colours. Colours of gore. Colours of today and of yesterday. Dreamy colours. Colours that paint nightmares on barren landscapes. She haunts yesterday's reefs and ridges with redness' (312). In the 1998 narrative, Zim's daughter, Qukezwa, is also on

the beach with her son, Heitsi, 'fill[ing] the valley with her many voices. She fills the wild beach with dull colours. Colours that are hazy and misty'. The two stories blend into a seamless narrative of the past and of the present, and the two voices combine into a single, split-tone song.

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KAI EASTON

Travelling through History, 'New' South African Icons: The Narratives of Saartje Baartman and Krotoä-Eva in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*¹

South African director Zola Maseko's documentary, *The Life & Times of Sara Baartman* — '*The Hottentot Venus*', is punctuated with the jazz singer Gloria Bosman's catchy continental refrain, 'I'm going back to Africa'. In 1998, when the film was completed, this projected homecoming was an optimistic conclusion to a nearly two-hundred-year-old story. Maseko's film turned out to be timely. In January 2002, the French government — apparently inspired to act by a poem to Saartje Baartman which appeared on the internet — announced that her remains would indeed be returned for burial in South Africa.² Following a ceremony in France in early May, they were flown from Paris back to Cape Town; and in August, marking her birthday (on the 9th) and nationwide Women's Day celebrations, Saartje Baartman was finally buried in her natal earth — in the Gamtoos Valley area of the Eastern Cape — as thousands looked on and a female choir sang 'You are returning to your fatherland under African skies' (see "'Hottentot Venus' Laid to Rest', online.)

SLIPPERY ICONS

This is and is not an article about Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001). It circles around her text, primarily to discuss two very allusive and elusive characters who figure in it, only to slip out of the story. As Dorothy Driver writes in her afterword to the Feminist Press edition of the novel: 'Where history is silent, myth often speaks, and Wicomb's reinvention of history needs to deal with a current mythification involving two early South African women, Krotoä/Eva and Saartje Baartman' (2001 228). Despite their fleeting presence in Wicomb's novel, both of these women, I would argue, are integral to a book that refuses to engage them wholeheartedly in its plot.

In history, Krotoä-Eva was a woman of considerable linguistic talents; she was also the first indigenous woman to have appeared in early Cape official records — including the governor's own journal. Saartje Baartman, born over 100 years later, was by no means the only African woman to be exhibited in Europe, but her story — even to the present day — has been particularly spectacular. In Wicomb's novel, these historical figures are linked as David Dirkse trawls through history

in search of his Griqua ancestry. A member of the ANC's military wing, David is married to Sally, a former comrade, but there is more than a suggestion in the novel of his attraction to Dulcie, another female comrade in the MK. Like the stories of Saartje and Krotoä, Dulcie's presence comes from an absence of detail — a refusal (in this case by David, rather than the narrator) to flesh out her story. For if Wicomb's novel makes gestures to the lives of Krotoä-Eva and Saartje Baartman, it also creates gaps, false links, difficult genealogies. As Driver notes:

Despite David's protests, the narrator leaves his story about Krotoa out of the text. She agrees to include his story about Saartje Baartman, but does not. And then she does not — untrustworthy indeed! — honor his request to remove references to his love for Dulcie. [2001 230]

Flitting in and out of centuries, in conversation and debate with a variety of texts (most notably Sarah Gertrude Millin's 1924 literary chronicle of miscegenation, *God's Stepchildren*),³ *David's Story* is firmly placed in the present too: alternating between Cape Town and Kokstad in 1991, a year into 'the New South Africa'.⁴

Baartman, in particular, has been much in the news, not only with her recent return and burial, but especially since the 1980s when South Africa, as Wicomb has said, 'discovered' her (1998 91). With the nation's transformation to a non-racial democracy, she has become an icon for Khoisan nationalists, who still feel politically and economically marginalised in the new ANC-led dispensation.⁵ Equally, Krotoä-Eva, as Carli Coetzee has written, in a current quest by some South Africans for authentic origins, is being remembered in the 'new' South Africa as 'the founding mother', and there have been recent recastings of her life both in books and on the stage.

In this historically demarcated nation (one which has also been newly demarcated in provincial terms), and in the wake of the TRC hearings and the Truth Commission report, there is an increasing focus on memory, history, and the creation of 'the South African story'.⁶ As part of this new story, how have Krotoä-Eva and Saartje Baartman as icons been transformed in the present? Equally, how might the remembering of them be complicit with the scientific and historical discourses that surrounded them during their lifetime? And what are the implications then of Wicomb's 'adoption' of Saartje Baartman and Krotoä-Eva as theoretical icons in two of her recent essays? Taking one of the intertextual avenues suggested by Wicomb's text and perhaps, even more so, by Driver's afterword, my interest is in exploring how Krotoä and Saartje, though separated in history by well over a century, have re-emerged as 'presences in the South African imaginary'.⁷

Like the concept of hybridity, a word taken from the biological and botanical sciences (Young 1994, 6) and today perhaps best known from Homi Bhabha's writings and postcolonial theory more widely, the icons of Krotoä and Saartje have travelled through history, shifting and acquiring new definitions — from the

age of colonialism, scientific racism and miscegenation to the current cultural politics of representation, reconciliation, and national belonging.

The writings of travellers, scientists, historians, literary critics and cultural theorists have signalled the symbolic importance of the Khoisan in this earlier context. J.M. Coetzee's seminal study, *White Writing*, and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* have contributed significantly to our knowledge of colonial discourse on the 'Hottentot';⁸ and a number of other influential scholarly works have discussed 'the Hottentot' as icon: for example Sander Gilman argues that,

while many groups of African blacks were known to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Hottentot remained representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female. Both concepts fulfilled an iconographic function in the perception and representation of the world. (255)

while Saul Dubow writes that

[a]s an icon of 'otherness', the Hottentot or Bosjesman (the terms were used more or less interchangeably until the mid-nineteenth century) occupies an important place in the history of Western thought. (20)

More specifically, Saartje Baartman was, as Sharpley-Whiting puts it in her book *Black Venus*, a 'cultural and scientific icon of primitivity and sexual depravity' (5).

The representation of Saartje and Krotoä as icons of 'otherness' and female 'sexual lasciviousness' in colonial times was followed by a new imaging of the 'Hottentots', influenced by Rousseau, as 'noble savages' (Dubow 24). In the 'new' South Africa, this has shifted again — into a language of national healing and veneration. I shall return to this in my concluding remarks, but first some biographical context.

THE NARRATIVES OF KROTOÄ-EVA AND SAARTJE BAARTMAN

Krotoä-Eva was a servant in the household of Jan van Riebeeck, the first governor of the Cape of Good Hope. She became fluent in Dutch and Portuguese, and acted as a translator between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi, marrying the Danish surgeon, Pieter van Meerhoff in 1664. This was the first marriage in the Cape Colony between native and settler (Wicomb 2001c), at a time when racial mixing, as Wicomb's narrator has it, was 'old hat in the melting pot of the Cape' (2001a, 41).⁹ When van Meerhoff died in a slaving expedition to Madagascar, however, Krotoä-Eva found herself on the outside of both cultures, 'rejected by both Khoi and Company' (Worden et al 23). Though baptised as a Christian, and the mother of van Meerhoff's children, she was banished to Robben Island, where she died from alcohol abuse in 1674.

In her obituary, her story is recorded to emphasise her 'unChristian' behaviour:

'This day departed this life, a certain female Hottentoo, named Eva, long ago taken from the African brood in her tender childhood by the Hon. van Riebeeck, and educated in his house as well as brought to the knowledge of the Christian faith, and being thus

transformed from a female Hottentoo almost into a Netherland woman, was married to a certain Chief Surgeon of this residency, by whom she had three children still living, and some others which had died. Since his death however at Madagascar, she had brought forth as many illegitimate ones, and for the rest, led such an irregular life, that for a long while the desire would have existed of getting rid of her, had it not been for the hope of the conversion of this brutal aboriginal, which was always still hovering between...' (qtd in Schapera, 1933 124–25)

In her essay on Krotoä-Eva, Carli Coetzee highlights not her 'degeneration into drunkenness and prostitution' as Wicomb has written (2001c online) but rather her genealogical contribution to early Cape society:

On the night of 8 February 1669 in Cape Town, two children were removed from the care of their mother, the Khoikhoi woman Krotoä. She had been living in a cottage (furnished by the Dutch East India Company) under the name Eva, and was the widow of Pieter van Meerhoff, a Danish surgeon who had joined the DEIC garrison in 1659. After the children were removed from her care, the house was boarded up, and the children put in the custody of a respectable member of the (white) Dutch community. *These children grew up as part of Cape Dutch society, and became the founding members of many Afrikaner families.* (Coetzee 112) [emphasis added]

The offspring of this first mixed-race marriage at the Cape of Good Hope thus become progenitors at the moment that their maternal line — and thereby their hybrid identity — is obscured. However, in the Cape today, as Carli Coetzee goes on to say, there are Afrikaners who are claiming rather than denying lineage with Krotoä in an effort to 'gain what seems like legitimate access to the new rainbow family' (115), and as J.M. Coetzee similarly remarks: 'For adventurously minded Afrikaners, laying claim to a dark ancestor now holds considerable cachet...' (2001 311).

Steven Robins also notes how some Khoisan nationalists, despite their 'complex ancestry', have claimed biological and cultural continuity to pre-colonial Khoisan ancestors such as Saartje Baartman and 'Krotoä (Eva)' (131). Robins cites specific examples — for instance, how Mansel Upham, previously categorised as 'white' in the 'old' South Africa and now 'the Griqua National Conference's legal representative, insisted upon making public his claims of genealogical links to a founding Khoi ancestor, Krotoä (Eva)' (134). Upham was also significantly involved in Griqua demands for Baartman's return. In a *Weekly Mail & Guardian* article he describes her symbolic importance today, proclaiming:

'Hottentots are the most dehumanised people in colonial history. Even today the term is used to designate non-human status and *Saartjie Baartman's remains are an icon of this history...*' (qtd in 'Bring Back' online) [emphasis added]

Cape Town historian Yvette Abrahams 'asserted a "Brown" identity that gave a personal resonance to her claims on the body' of Krotoä. (Robins 136). Abrahams is also interviewed in Maseko's documentary, and has published an essay on the

historiography of writing on Baartman where she observes how the earlier mythmaking around her 'became an increasingly conscious, and public, process' (224).

In the following parenthetical passage — in one of only two references to Krotoä in *David's Story* — Wicomb cunningly addresses the whole question of origins and colonial stereotypes:

(There is the indisputable example of the *first native woman of no parentage*, Eval Krotoa, who in spite of being taken into the cleanliness of the Dutch castle, in spite of marriage to a white man and fluency in his language, reverted to type and sold her own brown children's clothes for liquor.) (2001a 38) [emphasis added]

Genealogy is also a question in the case of Baartman. As Wicomb notes, hybridity is embedded in Saartje Baartman's very name [1998 93] (also seen in such variations as Saartjie, Sara, Sarah; Bartman, Bartmann). Though recent reports on Baartman seem more certain of biographical details, Sharpley-Whiting's study suggests these facts were not yet accounted for in 1999: 'mystery surrounds her date of birth, her date of death, her racial/ethnic origins — was she a Hottentot (Khoikhoi), a female Bushman (San), or a *sang-mêlé*?' (Sharpley-Whiting 17).

In 1810, about age 20 and by now working as a servant in Cape Town, Saartje Baartman left on a ship for England, apparently having entered into a contract with a ship's doctor, William Dunlop. In exchange for money and the promise of return passage to the Cape of Good Hope after five years, she was to exhibit her body — to crowds in London and subsequently private viewings in Paris — to those who would be fascinated by her steatopygia (a word Wicomb plays with and celebrates in her novel ([Driver 2001, 249]), the simultaneously exotic and primitive marker of black female sexuality which seduced science and, in particular, Napoleon's surgeon Georges Cuvier. Billed as 'The Hottentot Venus', in her life she was scrutinised, inspected and gazed at. After her death in Paris from small pox and alcoholism in 1815, Cuvier, 'the father of biology', dissected her. His 'gift' to science was to preserve her brains and genitals [considered remarkable for the legendary 'Hottentot apron'] in jars. These remained on exhibit in the Musée de l'Homme, along with her skeleton and a plaster cast of her body, until as recently as 1974.¹⁰

Maseko's *Life and Times of Sara Baartman* adds some scholarly as well as speculative shape to her story. In a review of the documentary, Neil Parsons highlights the following scene:

It is an account previously unknown to me, when Sara tells a Paris journalist about her origins. A female over-voice [*sic*] recounts with engaging simplicity a tale of childhood betrothal in the Houteniqua mountains, brutally interrupted by white settler slave-raiders attracted by the smoking fires of the pre-nuptial feast. *Who cares if it could have been a type-story rather than literal truth?* It is the one time in the film that we get a glimpse of a *real-seeming Sara*... (2002 online) [emphasis added]

Parsons intriguingly focuses on a potential memory recounted in the film, pointing to the need to reimagine the stories we have of these two women in fuller terms. Sharpley-Whiting's study was published the following year, but according to her brief biographical summary below, Saartje was married before going to Cape Town:

Born in Kaffraria in the interior of the Cape Colony of South Africa in approximately 1788, and renamed Saartjie Baartman when the region came under Dutch colonial rule, Baartman was one of six siblings. Her father was a drover of cattle who was killed by neighbouring San, and her mother died when she was two years old. Her husband was a drummer, and she had had one child, who died shortly after birth. She became a domestic of sorts to a Boer farmer, Peter Cezar, at the Cape of Good Hope. (17)

THEORETICAL ICONS

In her essay, 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa' [1998], Wicomb sets out how Saartjie Baartman illustrates, as a 'body bound up with the politics of location' (93), many of the concerns of postcolonialism and postmodernism. After introducing her story, she frames her discussion around Saartje, who becomes representative, not only on a national level, but on an individual level. Wicomb 'adopts' her as 'icon' (as she phrases it [93]) and goes on to provide a remarkable listing of the theoretical possibilities offered by Baartman. In addition to her postcolonial symbolism, Wicomb writes:

The Baartman case also neatly exemplifies some of the central concerns of postmodern thought — the inscription of power in scopic relations, the construction of woman as racialised and sexualised other; the colonisation and violation of the body; the role of scientific discourse in bolstering both the modernist and the colonial projects — and is thus a convenient point around which to discuss the contested relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism. (93)

While Wicomb's critical writings, as Driver suggests, certainly provide fascinating intertextual links with *David's Story*, they also set up a discourse about representation that the novel itself interrogates.

In 'Translation and Coetzee's *Disgrace*', a paper given at the University of Zurich last year, Wicomb employs Krotoä, the successful translator (who has also been 'translated' by the Dutch into 'Eva') as an opening to her discussion of Coetzee's novel.

The story of the indigenous Khoikhoi woman, Krotoä, is an exemplary case in which translation as a figure within the narrative of colonial subject formation can be examined. (2001c online)

However her reinscription of Baartman and Krotoä in these essays is playfully undercut when the unnamed narrator in her novel admits to excluding the origins

of David's story. He has tried to link his narrative genealogy, no less, with that of the 'founding mother' and, subsequently, Saartje:

David's story started at the Cape with Eva/Krotoä, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle, the only section I have left out. He eventually agreed to that but was adamant about including a piece on Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus placed on display in Europe. One cannot write nowadays, he said, without a little monograph on Baartman; it would be like excluding history itself. (2001a 1)

David's Story has been described as 'elegaic, wry, and expansive'¹¹ and, indeed it is, as well as copious in its interweavings, and deliberately neglectful of continuities, but to return to my earlier question: what do we make of these new translations of Krotoä and Saartje? Here, in Wicomb's own words, they become 'icons' of critical discourse. Are both the essays and the novel part of another strategy in the literature of the 'postcolonial exotic'? Is Wicomb, as Graham Huggan would suggest, 'working from within exoticist codes of representation' in order to subvert them or is she redeploying them 'for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power'? (32).

Both essays move from examples of a hybrid identity (in the form of an actual historical figure) to a convincing challenge to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, particularly in the case of the first essay, in terms of its inapplicability in regional (Cape) terms. The specificity of the Cape coloured¹² community requires elaboration of Bhabha's theory, for his discussion of hybridity, migration and diaspora does not, as Wicomb argues, translate to a culture where miscegenation and slave origins are suppressed or where, instead of liminality and displacement, there is a real sense of belonging, even 'a proprietorial attitude towards the Cape' (Wicomb 1998, 105). As Robins writes, 'many of the people referring to themselves as Brown, Coloured, and Griqua are in fact of slave-European-African-Khoi-San ancestry' (133). Wicomb herself proposes the idea of 'multiple belongings', which can conflict, overlap and negotiate difference as an alternative to 'denying history and fabricating a totalising colouredness' (1998 105).

Yet if Bhabha's use of the term is unable to accommodate the current politics of identity in the Western Cape, hybridity's longer history reveals itself as perfectly accommodating, suggesting a range of shifting definitions. Robert Young has brilliantly mapped this out in *Colonial Desire*, demonstrating 'the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse':

it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references.... *There is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity*.... The question is whether the old essentialising categories of cultural identity, or of race, were really so essentialised, or have been retrospectively constructed as more fixed than they were. When we look at the texts of racial theory, we find that they are in fact contradictory, disruptive and already deconstructed. (27) [emphasis added]

The process of remembering and forgetting is thus embedded in the history of hybridity. Encompassing both celebration and denial, it can involve a selectivity similar to that of nationalism. As Bhabha writes 'The national memory is always the site of the hybridity of histories and the displacement of memories' (169).

Iconicity is equally selective and varying: it can be used (as in the past) to make a whole people stand for 'otherness' (as in the Khoisan, or the 'Hottentots'); it can be used more specifically to make a person stand for a race and gender's 'otherness' (as in Saartje or Krotoä — black female sexuality and pathology); or, again as in the examples of Saartje and Krotoä, it can be redefined and used as a reminder of its historical meaning (their past suffering as women and that of all Khoisan). It can also, if we look at current references, move into a language of veneration (and here we might also think of the 'new' South African icons of Mandela and Tutu).

'THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL SYMBOLIC'¹³

While the issue of Baartman's return to South Africa for burial has stimulated much debate and discussion, there has been little attention to the way in which the contestation involved in claiming her, the questions regarding her ethnicity, and the proposals concerning the site for her burial, are connected with a history of spectacle which continues to the present day, both in the media and academia. Graham Huggan's thought-provoking and richly argued study, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, provides a helpful framework here:

The exoticist production of otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and reconciliation, but legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest. (13)

The controversial 1996 museum exhibition *Miscast* has been called the 'catalyst for the production of collective memories and the articulation of KhoiSan and Coloured ethnic nationalism' [Robins 132]. Despite its intentions, it was perhaps a perfect example of the exotic representation of otherness described by Huggan above. While the guest curator, Pippa Skotnes, argued that its aim was to expose and challenge colonial practices of representation, it was interpreted by many, most of all the Khoisan themselves, as a further example of violence and exploitation. Following intense debate and exchange between Skotnes and some of her detractors, we have the publication of her accompanying book, with a foreword written by Marilyn Martin that singles out Saartje Baartman not only as a Khoisan icon, but a national icon:

For all of us [Saartje Baartman] stands as a reminder of the agonies of the past, of our need to face and deal with history and memory, and of our collective responsibility to resist a desire for historical amnesia. The debates around her also impact on issues of redress and restitution of land, and land is inextricably linked to place and identity.

(Martin 9)

After Mandela's election in 1994, campaigns began in earnest for Baartman's return to South Africa for a decent burial: this itself has been another reason for debate. Is she from the Eastern or Western Cape? Is the Cape a strategically or appropriately national site for her burial, as Wicomb asks or even, as has been suggested by the renowned paleo-anthropologist Philip Tobias, for a shrine?¹⁴ Interviewed in the *Daily Mail & Guardian*), Willa Boezak had this to say:

[When] we celebrate her homecoming it will be a spiritual ceremony.... It will be a reburial. It will not be a Cape Town thing, it will not be a Griqua thing, it will be a national thing. ('Rejoicing' 2002 online)

In McGreal's article for *The Guardian* [2002], Cecil le Fleur's response similarly suggests that the significance of Saartje Baartman's return goes beyond the politics of ethnicity:

Irrespective of the fact that she is of Khoisan descent, we don't want to create the impression that we claim her as Khoisan property. Mostly, we want her to have a decent burial and to treat her in death how she was never treated in life. (online)

And Matty Cairncross, also a member of the Khoisan community, claims that:

'The return of Saartje Baartman to South Africa is a victory for all South Africans and indigenous peoples of the world. It's an historic moment for everyone, especially for women in South Africa. She can be a unifying symbol for us'. (qtd in Allie, online)

David's Story ends dramatically, with a bullet shooting through the narrator's computer, leaving scrambled words, 'impossible hybrids' (213). The text we are reading then, is apparently not the one that was written.¹⁵ Additionally, David's amanuensis has played havoc with his story throughout — erasing and reinventing as she sees fit. What we are left with is a co-authored text which negotiates versions of the truth, and the icons of Krotoä and Saartje reside as palimpsests, while the haunting figure of Dulcie 'echoes like a scream' throughout the pages, refusing to fully emerge or disappear.¹⁶ In some ways, then, the narratives of Saartje Baartman and Krotoä-Eva hardly find a home in Wicomb's hugely ambitious novel, but as Driver says, through her playful exclusion and inclusion of these two icons, 'the narrator's decision to erase David's stories about them flies in the face of ... current ethnic identifications' (2001 231).

AFTERWORD

On the surface, the American Feminist Press edition of Wicomb's book, which contains Driver's skilful and authoritative afterword, is a necessary appendage: another narrator takes over and fills in the gaps, 'unravels', as it were, the literary and historical intertexts for an international readership. While Driver has produced a superbly researched, self-conscious and almost exhaustive critical analysis, we

might still question the marketing of this novel — which is so wittily attentive to interpretative strategies — with an afterword that, in the end, explains it all.¹⁷

Saartje and Krotoä have both been called icons and symbols ‘of an era in the history of the world, ... when colonialism and imperialist subjugation was carried out without anyone being answerable to anyone else’ (Tobias qtd in Ferreira, online). However, the current mythologising of Saartje Baartman seems certain to supercede that of her seventeenth-century predecessor Krotoä, the Khoi woman who died on Robben Island. President Thabo Mbeki ‘has declared [Baartman’s] grave a national monument and said a second monument will be erected in her honour in Cape Town’ (‘“Hottentot Venus” Laid to Rest’, online). ‘Plans are afoot’, says another report, for a ‘shrine of remembrance where people can come to pay homage and respects to her memory’ (Allie, online).

Krotoä Eva’s story might have travelled through history and joined up with Saartje’s, but for the woman they called ‘the Hottentot Venus’, it is not only her story, but an image of her — once the very icon of ‘otherness’ on display in the Musée de l’Homme, now the ‘new’ South African icon of inclusiveness and unity — which, in its reproduction, seems likely to become an object of international veneration such as the scientist Cuvier could never have imagined. According to Professor Tobias, as the original ‘plaster cast of her body remains in Paris, ... the South African government has asked for a copy of it’ (Ferreira, online).

NOTES

- ¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at ‘Versions and Subversions’, an international conference on African literature at Humboldt University, Berlin on 2 May 2002. Coincidentally, this was the day that Baartman was being flown back to Cape Town. I am grateful for the comments and questions that followed in the discussion, particularly a reminder of the case of El Negro, the African man returned to Botswana from Spain in October 2000. See ‘Stuffed Man’, online.
- ² According to a report on the SABC, ‘It was Diana Ferrus’s poem that brought a breakthrough after years of campaigning. A French senator saw it on the Internet and asked for a translation’. See ‘Saartjie’s Remains to Come Back Home’ (online).
- ³ It encompasses much of the relevant history of Adam Kok, which is covered in Millin’s novel. Specific references to Millin occur for example in Wicomb 2001a, p. 38 and p. 161; additionally, see the epigraph from *God’s Stepchildren*, p. 63.
- ⁴ As Rob Nixon notes, de Klerk coined the term on 2 February 1990, the day he announced Mandela’s release (196). See also Attridge and Jolly (4).
- ⁵ See McGreal, quoting Cecil le Fleur, chairman of the National Khoisan Consultative Conference Council; see also Mansel Upham in ‘Bring back the Hottentot Venus’: ‘Bringing back her remains can help to ... stimulate a debate about aboriginal groups — like the “bushmen”, Griquas and coloureds — who have been neglected in reductionist black and white versions of our history’ (online).
- ⁶ Sanders 17 on the Truth Commission report writing what it terms ‘the South African story’.

- ⁷ Many thanks to Liz Gunner for this phrase.
- ⁸ See Schapera, 1933 and 1960. In *Early Cape Hottentots*, a volume edited for the Van Riebeeck Society in 1933, Schapera writes: 'The Hottentoots or Hottentots, a name under which they have become celebrated in ethnography, history and general literature' (i); but he also acknowledges the distinction between their self-representation and the European designation: 'They all allied themselves *Khoikhoin*, "men of men, people of pure race", a name by which they distinguished themselves from others. The term *Hottentots*, by which they are now universally known, was imposed upon them by the Europeans about the middle of the seventeenth century' (v). Recent practice refers to Khoisan or KhoiSan; while 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman', as pejorative historical terms, are commonly written with inverted commas.
- ⁹ See Elphick and Malherbe, and Elphick and Shell for historical accounts on Khoisan and settler interrelations in the early Cape Colony.
- ¹⁰ There are conflicting accounts in news reports as to when exactly her remains were removed from display; Wicomb says it was in the 1980s (1998 91).
- ¹¹ Publicity blurb, inside jacket of Feminist Press edition (Wicomb 2001a).
- ¹² Following Wicomb, I use the lowercase spelling unless it appears as part of an article title where the house style is that nouns are capitalised or where I am quoting from a text which still uses uppercase. As J.M. Coetzee writes: 'with a *Q* the term still carries apartheid echoes; with a *q* it is more or less neutral' (2001 308).
- ¹³ A phrase from Bhabha in interview with Attwell (108).
- ¹⁴ See Wicomb (1998 91). Maseko's documentary on Baartman ends with discussion about negotiations for her return. Tobias suggests that they might want to have a shrine in Cape Town, with Khoisan curators, since it was from Cape Town that she left for England. Tobias means this as a dignified tribute, but it is again the language of veneration that interests me here.
- ¹⁵ Or is it? Just before the bullet hits the computer, the narrator includes this aside: 'I take a break from writing this impossible story with a turn in my unseasonable garden, slipping a backup disk into my pocket as I always do' (212).
- ¹⁶ David describes her as 'a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story' (Wicomb 2001a, 134).
- ¹⁷ Thanks to Amar Bhatia, for an intellectually engaging essay (submitted in January 2002) on Toni Morrison's introduction to the new English translation of Camara Laye's *Radiance of the King*, New York Review of Books edition [2002], to which further discussion of Driver's afterword in Wicomb's novel might provide interesting comparisons. Tellingly the local Kwela edition of *David's Story* contains no such critical apparatus. Note the reissue in 1999 by the Feminist Press of Wicomb's first work of fiction, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, includes both an historical introduction and critical essay. See also Driver's substantial article on this earlier work in *World Literature Today*.

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MARGARET HANZIMANOLIS

Southern African Contact Narratives: The Case of T'Kama Adamastor and its Reconstructive Project

[I]n the very principle of its constitution, in its language, and in its finalities, narrative about Africa is always pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people. More precisely, Africa is the mediation that enables the West to accede to its own subconscious and give a public account of its subjectivity (Achille Mbembe 3).

Contact narratives that elaborate early European encounters with regions and peoples later colonised are commonly formulated in terms of explanatory myths that elaborate an 'originary' site. Because these chosen scenes interrupt what is most often a long line of possible foundational moments, examining which scenes are chosen and how they are cast into iconographic terms can expose cultural anxieties. This essay will examine the deformative particulars that adhere to one contemporary South African painting concerned with contact narratives and colonial tropes. It will then be shown how the persistence of these deformations, specifically as they are applied to the body and its reproductive capacity, signals a reluctance, on the part of the formerly dominating culture, to relinquish command of certain enclaves of influence, in this case commemorating public art in South Africa.

A GESTURE OF BELONGING

Three years ago a large, well researched and privately funded painting was hung on the North wall of the University of Witwatersrand Cullen Library in Johannesburg, South Africa. It was commissioned in order to complete a trilogy of paintings, all of which in one way or another were meant to 'commemorate specific historical events' in South Africa (Nethersole 33) by putting forward one version of the several strands of colonial mythography available to illustrate a theme that was relevant to late twentieth-century South Africa but drawn from some early contact narrative. The trilogy of paintings includes 'Colonists 1826' by Colin Gill (1934), 'Vasco da Gama: Departure for the Cape' by J.H. Amsheiwitz (1935), and most recently 'T'Kama Adamastor' by Cyril Coetzee (1999).

'Colonists 1826' (donated to the Witwatersrand University) takes up the British thread, and locates the originary emblem of colonisation more remote geographically than one might expect. The British settlers shown in Gill's painting are, in point of fact, still aboard ship. Furthermore, with the exception of one small child, they are all facing each other, rather than either of the two background land masses, one of which is presumably their destination, the headlands of the Algoa Bay.¹ (See figure 4, p. 252.) Two dozen settlers and seamen populate this cropped vision of a shipboard scene, the rectilinear canvas and display space accommodating the long, horizontal axis of a sailing ship. However, in a design that was no doubt influenced in part by the perspectival problems of showing the ship, the sea, the colonists, and the land — the land has been given short shrift. The several distant land masses that are visible are relegated to the background of the composition and are favoured with the least painterly detail, but the viewer, standing outside of the frame, so to speak, conjoins the essential constituent elements, and thus apprehends the weakly inflected land and sea and the strongly inflected ship and colonists as one more or less integrated syntax — one contiguous symbolic gesture. Rather conspicuously absent from Gill's canvas, however, are several of what may be supposed to be vital components in a full treatment of any African contact narrative: the Indigenous man and woman, the botanical specimen or grand vista, and the animals of southern Africa.

Despite these rather interesting omissions, we are concerned here with two relatively minor features of Gill's painting. Firstly, the land itself is not represented with a set of unambiguous identifying markers. Secondly, the colonists are not integrated with their destination: *they look only at each other*, in a self regarding tableau, and while it seems likely that they are meant to be seen as approaching their destination, in fact they are frozen in transit (poised in mid sea) and so suspended between an offstage departure and an unscripted arrival.

Formulated in terms of a particularly 'ungrounded' trope,² this originary mythic scene thus composes itself around a shipload of immigrants who are not only occupying a discontinuity (between arrival and departure), but are also caught between impossible alternatives, for both land masses in the background are forbidding. One issues glowering storm clouds; the other is clothed in an otherworldly blue sheen, but is presumably their destination, as a divine dove hovers above it. The site of the commemorated moment, one which we might expect to refer to a notion of nascent or as yet unstable national identity, is, in fact, so geographically and pictorially remote from the set of activities or appetites that we have come to associate with colonisation that we are startled to realise that the figures on the ship are related to the land mass that they intend to colonise (but to which they have literally turned their backs) *only through the imagination*. There has been, it is safe to say, no contact. What is being depicted, then, is not so much a design with illustrative intent — figures arrayed on the deck of a ship, engaged in various shipboard activities. What Gill is attempting is that which is

impossible to paint: the colonists *thinking* about *what will come to be* 'South Africa'. What is being commemorated, in fact, is an act of the mind.

'Vasco da Gama — Departure for the Cape' by John Henry Amsheiwitz was hung in 1936, (two years later than Gill's painting) but rolls back the originary scene almost four hundred years, and the viewer is met with a larger than life Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese King Manuel I, crew members, passengers and patrons — again on board ship, and again regarding one another. (See figure 5, p. 252.) These figures vibrate with splendid religious fervour and virile strength, suggesting a heroically disposed and divinely sanctioned enterprise. The date is 1497 and they are about to depart Lisbon.

* * * *

To be clear: up until 1999, in one of the largest public rooms of one of the largest university libraries in southern Africa, two prominently displayed and enormous public paintings are commemorating not the birth of a nation or even a notation of some local event of a threshold nature, but a pair of genesis moments located so far back up the birth canal, so to speak, as to render them (pictorially at least) unrecognisable as exclusively or particularly southern African. These onboard scenes could be narrating a voyage to India, South America, North America, the Philippines, the Caribbean, so stubbornly indeterminate are they with regard to both geographic and historical points of reference. If the Amsheiwitz painting reproduces an event that is geographically remote from South Africa, it also locates an historical moment that is only accidentally related to South Africa. Vasco da Gama, in fact, sailed many thousands of sea miles, and if there is any land mass to which he was unambiguously directed, it was India, not the Cape of Good Hope or Algoa Bay, which were, after all, stopovers for water or other provisions on that 1497–99 trip round the southern tip of Africa, to India, and back to Portugal³ (Axelson 17). While Luis de Camões epic poem, *The Lusíads*, linked Vasco da Gama's sea voyage round Africa with the triumphant foundational myths of Portugal (Duffy 15), it is not entirely clear how or why this Portuguese explorer would figure so prominently in twentieth-century South African 'genesis' mythography, especially when Bartholomew Dias planted his *padrao* near the Boesman River mouth almost ten years earlier (Axelson 6).

Even so, Reingard Nethersole summarises the 'pictorial lesson' functioning in both paintings as a lesson 'in the anxiety and uncertainty white pioneers had to undergo, and the *defiant bravery* they had to exhibit, *in order to overcome adversity and make the country inhabitable*' (37) [emphasis added]. Although the voyagers can be read as experiencing 'anxiety and uncertainty', three of Nethersole's other attributions seem unwarranted. First of all, the adversity that must be overcome remains undramatised and secondly the exhibition of defiant bravery she accords these white pioneers is unstaged — there are no opponents in either composition to stimulate bravery nor a visible force with which to complete a diagram of

adversity. Finally, and more seriously, the 'country' that Nethersole claims is in need of being made 'habitable' is either absent from the pictorial field or visually unarticulated — and we do know by now that 'the country' was not only 'habitable' but inhabited in 1826 and had been so for a good many centuries.

If the first two paintings that form the trilogy avoid significant engagement with a body of presumably important images having to do with the actual African land mass, the actual plants and animals that had purchase there, the Indigenous Africans inhabiting the continent, and the earliest contact narratives that described these features, the third painting has come into being with most of what we might call the significant elements in place. The plant life and topography, the animals, and the Indigene are all, finally, present.

Cyril Coetzee's painting 'T'Kama Adamastor' (1999), the third painting of the trilogy, seeks to remedy the obvious geographic and cultural lacunae of the previous paintings, and in doing so presents a densely populated and oversymbolised (Herwitz 74) human dram, one framed by scenes of European arrival and departure. The action of the painting seems to be grounded on a peninsula of southern Africa, as the ocean enfolds both sides of a triangle of land. There are ships with bird-like attributes approaching on the left, and other bird-like ships heading away from the land on the far right. (See figure 1, p. 249.)

'T'Kama Adamastor' is hung where John Fassler, an architectural designer who assisted in redesigning the interior space in the 1930s (and who left a watercolour sketch of the space), had envisioned a painting that would celebrate the triumph of mining in South Africa and complete the trilogy for which the space had been reserved. Coetzee chose instead to retreat to more remote, and conceivably safer, terrain: a moment of imagined first cultural contact. The project was put at a further distance by Coetzee's reliance on the ironising narrative of a fictional text rather than any of the available historical texts elaborating first or early contact between 'Indigenous southern Africans' and 'Europeans'. Coetzee, in fact, uses a number of narrative elements from André Brink's 1983 novella *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* in order to visualise his sixteenth-century subject from a late twentieth-century vantage point.

The painting 'T'Kama Adamastor' was itself memorialised at birth: soon after the unveiling an accompanying exegesis, *T'Kama Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting*, was published. Edited by Ivan Vladislavíc, the explanatory text is a lavish, nearly two-hundred page, large format book, that combines quality colour reproductions commonly associated with the coffee table book and essays of a decidedly scholarly slant — footnotes, literary references, historical and art historical minutiae — most of which provide an elaborate

rationalisation and explanation for the many narratively or historically grounded figures (human beings, animal beings, hybridised creatures, alchemical symbols, and a ship's figurehead) with which Coetzee has peopled his 'invented' peninsular world.

T'Kama Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting provides a fascinating and detailed mapping of how the images of the painting 'T'Kama Adamastor' derive their visual authority, such as they have, from a number of pertinent touchstones of four centuries of European art, from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. In the service of this explanatory project, the editors of this book have collected a magnificent group of high-quality reproductions of old maps, Medieval and Renaissance paintings, alchemical and travelogue engravings, painting-in-progress photographs, stained glass windows, and zoological and botanical plates. Most of the reproductions (over 150) and all fourteen of the essays examine the complex Eurocentric visual vocabulary and set of conceptual grids with which European perspectives on Africa were elaborated: the allure of the kingdom of Prester John, the early division of Africa into eastern and western Ethiopia, Ptolemy's theories, alchemy, Dürer, Brueghel, Bosch, Luis de Camões' epic poem *The Lusíads*, to abbreviate a very long list. Finally, Coetzee's own essay 'Introducing the Painting' spells out how his images are intimately connected, perhaps most intimately of all, to Brink's novella *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*.

The essays gathered in this memorialising text troll back and forth through the European art historical, allegorical, mapping, and travelogue roots from which many, or perhaps all, of Coetzee's images were developed. In explaining the Eurocentric visual and conceptual models from which the painting arises, three of the commentators nonetheless produce a puzzling assertion: the artist, we are told, is painting from the 'perspective of the original Khoi inhabitants' (Nethersole 35), the indigenous perspective' (Vladislavíc Introduction), and 'through the eyes of an indigenous African people' (Crump Forward). In this 'sympathetic' positioning, Coetzee is following the orientation of Brink's novel, *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*, in which the narrator muses, in an editorial aside, about the Adamastor myth: '[S]uppose there *were* an Adamastor ... how would *he* look back, from the perspective of the late twentieth century, on that original experience?' [Brink's emphasis] (13). It is in this rhetorical question that Brink notifies the reader of his intention to inhabit the subject position of a hybrid figure assembled out of three traditions: the Indigenous (a Khoikhoi chief), the mythological (a European 'avatar' with the profile and name of Adamastor), and the literary/postmodern (the narrator/character who refuses historical grounding, and alludes to Rabelais, Camões, T.S. Eliot in self-conscious authorial asides). Adamastor, the Greek god who is figured as promontory, weather, and dark guard of the Cape, is a sixteenth-century elaboration that Camões developed in the *Lusiads* and has been interpreted variously as rapist, transgressor, seer and prophet,

and bumbling romancer. The figure of Adamastor is rewritten in dozens of South African poems, novels, and other fictional works.

Chief T'Kama, then, is the first-person narrator of Brink's central drama, and though he is smitten by, and then abducts, a sixteenth-century Portuguese woman, he fails to consummate the desired sexual relationship because of a huge and unruly penis, a body part which he bestialises by referring to it as 'Big Bird'. While this summary strips the novel of nuance, it helps to focus on some very specific tropes as we begin to turn to the main subject of this essay — a privately commissioned, commemorating art work that dominates a public space in a post-apartheid era university.

Quite mistakenly, the reader is led to believe that while the form of the various images in Coetzee's painting derive from Eurocentric models, the orientation of the work was 'from the perspective' of the indigenous African. Of the commentators, only Daniel Herwitz offers a critique of the way that European symbols are employed in the painting, and he alone challenges the so-called 'African perspective' from which, the reader is told, the painting arises (Herwitz 81–82). I will examine just one set of visual elements emanating from the so-called 'perspective of the indigene'. Coetzee gives the Portuguese seamen bird heads, their ships are bird-like, and their small boats are eggs which emit the explorers when they land. To give an idea of how the bird-referenced images of the painting were derived from a confusing mixture of generative forces, consider that this trope was assembled from a traveller's account of the Tuareg's 'magical' explanation of European invaders in Northern Africa, a painting by the twentieth-century fantastic realist Ernest Fuchs, a painting by Cesare da Sesto's (after da Vinci's sixteenth-century painting of the same name) called 'Leda and the Swan', Benin ivories, the 'bird-like attributes' of European costumes as exemplified by M. de Faria y Sousa's engraving of da Gama, and Brink's (fictional) descriptions of the arriving Portuguese ships (Coetzee 9–10).

If this is the kind of iconic hybridity that qualifies, in the eyes of a number of serious commentators, as an attempt to visualise the self (that is, the European) through the eyes of the other (that is, the southern African Indigene), then it is time to signal the patrons, the creators and the elaborators of this project that the project has failed in one of its presumed intents.

Other than the bird/man trope that draws from an early textual account of Northern African encounter, and the foreground figure giving the hand sign of Blake's Adam (see figures 2 and 3) — which also means 'presence of giraffes' in the San hunter's sign language (Coetzee 14) — the images, the narratives contained, and the intra-visual dynamics appear to depend exclusively on more or less unreconstructed Eurocentric contact myths, and the 'perspective' of the sixteenth-century Indigene, if such a thing could be excavated from four centuries of systematic erasures, is so deeply sub-textualised, so unhelpfully parodied, or,

by some critical lights, so entirely absent, that to assert such a thing becomes, itself, a kind of parody.

Thus, while both Brink's novella and Coetzee's painting might be termed postmodern — the novella straddles four centuries and employs a number of structural markers associated with the 'postmodern', most notably an unstable authorial voice(s) and a densely allusional text, and the painting is a *tour de force* of visual hybridity — neither usefully reconstructs the foundational myths of South Africa, especially when it comes to black male sexuality or white female vulnerability. Instead they fall back on an exhausted explanatory mode that, because it is phrased ironically, manages to have it both ways. Attempting to inhabit the subject position of the Indigene does not rescue the project from the pitfalls of irony. Although we have many examples of writers and artists productively, indeed successfully, utilising the subject position of the 'other', I suggest that this practice can be harmful when that which is represented unwittingly extends habits of 'deformation'. The body itself is particularly subject to the marks of representative deformation. Thus, while the usurpation of a subject position can be seen to enjoy a promiscuous realm — at least in the theoretically unbounded register of appropriation — parody itself is not without difficulties. A strategy familiar to both textual treatments and visual productions, parody is an especially risky mode when 'consumers' of the art or text do not share or are not sharing the same ground assumptions, historical reference points, or, in the case of visual arts, practices of visual decoding. Parody is born of irony and the success of the ironising project is dependent upon a rather comprehensive understanding of the field from which the irony arises — further, for irony to succeed there must be a category of readers who do not 'get it'. Irony, successful irony, thus rests on the lurking possibility that the viewer or reader will mistake the counterfeit position for the real position. Variations of insider trading, irony and parody are the only rhetorical practices in which one can have it both ways: the writer or artist is licensed to make the (usually offensive) representation while, at the same time, refusing or critiquing the representation.⁴

Notwithstanding the general difficulties outlined above, I wish to move on to focus on two particular aspects of the painting which might be called minor, but which raise the question of the place of the generative body and generative organs in the iconography of the formulation of 'nation'. Both the Brink novella and the Coetzee painting have as one of their central comic tropes an Indigenous man's unruly, beastialised, and oversized penis, which may be read as an attempt to parody white male anxiety over black male sexual capacity.⁵ While the size of Brink's black phallus (that grows daily until T'Kama must wrap it twice round his waist) deters intercourse with a captured sixteenth-century Portuguese noblewoman, Coetzee's front and centre visual pun positions an ostrich neck and head so as to comically extend the loin-clothed genitals of the Khoikhoi chief, as he lounges next to a wide-spreading African thorn tree and a nearly naked redhead

— a new world Adam and Eve in an expressly Biblical (though reordered by suggestive miscegenation) tableau. However, in Brink's parody of colonial mythographies of black male sexuality and Coetzee's reconstruction of a number of colonial tropes, the reader encounters a mild discomfort, typically felt when one is in the presence of a signifier that feels deformed, or deforming, and an ironising project that has not entirely escaped its base representation.

It is to Coetzee's painting that I turn to because it is the painting of our time; it is the painting for which we are, broadly speaking, responsible, and precisely because it has set for itself the impossible task of challenging originary myths, parodying colonial tropes, and in so doing presenting a collapsed, hybridised, and allegorised colonial moment, we are obliged to assess whether its intended parodies have successfully escaped their root tropes. Mythically altered colonists (bird-headed); exoticised and decontextualised animals; a nearly naked white woman: all are made to assume their symbolic postures in the ironic register — all being what they are meant to critique. Two Indigenous women appear in a mini-scene in a river or lake, the water up to their waists and their lower bodies invisible to the viewer. The sole white woman, consistent with the frictions typical of 'black peril' narratives, is positioned alluringly while remaining forbidden. She functions as a commodity in a cross cultural exchange between men: the desiring Khoikhoi chief and his men carrying her off in the left background of the painting, the Portuguese seamen recapturing her and returning her to the ship in the right background. A few of the mini-scenes, such as the erection of the Dias *padrao* in the left background, are illustrating an event well documented by the historical record.⁶ However, even this compositional element furthers the conceit of the oversized phallus, the Europeans 'raising' the *Padrao* in the background, re-enacting the white male appropriation of the 'right' to the phallic symbol — erecting it, as it were, and planting it in the soil of Africa.

Aside from this problem of how historical narrative is intertwined with several strands of mythic, art historical and fictional narrative, and the difficulty of decoding the strands and isolating the degree of ironising intent applicable to each strand, it is clear that that Coetzee has attempted to expand the handful of iconic figures available to visual artists for the narration of scenes of foundational myth. His success is mixed. On the one hand, by recombining visual elements from other eras, he has indeed come up with 'new' images with which to represent, or remember, a colonial encounter. His new images are hybrids built of disparate parts: so we can say that he remembers by dismembering.⁷ His explorers are bird-headed, for instance, having lost their own heads, and the crocodile smiling in the centrefold (derived from Brink's narrative), has dismembered the chief. In the novella the crocodile bites off the offending and grotesquely enlarging penis of the afflicted Khoikhoi chief, T'Kama.

These dismembered figures, then, do inaugurate an invigorated visual vocabulary. On the other hand, Coetzee's new configurations must certainly

remain, on most levels to most of their audience, incomprehensible. The European art historical and travelogue allusions are rarefied; the close narrative linkage with a not well known novella becomes a puzzle to the viewer who has no access to the novel or the commentary text; and finally, the ironical stance that mimics racist and sexist colonial tropes is not consistently applied, thus it is difficult to apply the right kind of refusal that irony calls upon us to make, to each of the elements. Turtles copulating in the foreground? (See figure 3, p. 251.) Well, if I have the book (Brink's or Vladislavíc's), I can pore over the text looking for an explanation. If I do not, I am left with turtles copulating in the foreground.

Since iconographic communication, or the success of iconographic communication at least, rests on the deployment of a fairly stylised set of visual symbols that are read more or less reliably by viewers, it is reasonable to ask just how far this ostensible movement away from European dominated historiography has taken the Witwatersrand students (who are the primary audience of the painting), with what methods this movement has been accomplished, and to what effect. These are, however, not questions I will be answering. Suffice to say that in this third, recently 'unveiled' canvas, explorers and colonists (sole subjects of the previous two works of art) have finally touched land; the Indigene has finally arrived in the architecturally-reserved space of commissioned art at Witwatersrand University, and in so doing so, has crossed a late twentieth-century frontier. If I have a number of reservations about the composition itself, and of the parodies that produce some not entirely successful visual puns (most pertinent to the following discussion, the penis of the foreground Khoikhoi, elongated by an ostrich neck), I can say that the Indigene and the white explorer/colonist have been, in 1999, finally brought into the same frame.

THE DARKROOM

The mythography of pre-colonial southern Africa enacted in Coetzee's painting occupies space, quite obviously, in a real world. The University of Witwatersrand is an historically white institution whose student body was ninety-eight percent white from the 1930s, when the first paintings were hung, to the late 1990s, when the student body demographics underwent radical change, and is now made up of somewhere around thirty percent non-white students, though resistance to racial classifications in some circles in contemporary South Africa makes these kind of statistics questionable. If we want to see this painting, this 'history on white linen' as Herwitz calls it, as an attempt to maintain dominance in a kind of European-referenced national memorialising project, it is instructive to look at one further example of the 'mechanisms' and 'effects' of iconised coding in a university setting in contemporary South Africa, this one from an historically black institution (HBI),⁸ the University of Transkei (Unitra).

At Transkei where I worked as a volunteer visiting academic in 1999 there was a photographer on the payroll. He was hard-working, helpful, and provided a

barely visible 'visual arts' presence in an environment more or less bereft of projects or ongoing engagement with what might be termed 'the arts'. There were no art classes, no art exhibits, no graphic arts programs, no acting or theatre programs, no creative writing projects, no commissioned art works, but this photographer did have a darkroom on campus.

The images he was called upon to produce were mostly rote PR fare: new buildings, committees, and honourees, but his real talent, and his real interest, was in medical and forensic photography: autopsies and operations. According to him, he made these photographs for 'teaching purposes'.⁹ However, the hundred or so images I saw, which were snapshot-sized, were a grizzly parade with uncertain pedagogical application: the genitals of a woman who had been raped and murdered and whose mutilations rendered her anatomy unrecognisable, a big glistening liver marked with striations from the impact of an automobile crash, poisoned children whose bodies had turned bluish and bloated, a skull with a large chunk of glass embedded in it, punctured organs from failed operations, tubercular lungs, gunshot wounds.

Black bodies, or parts of black bodies, were the subject, though one could not be certain in the case of the organs. These images were, however, more or less anonymous — the patient's, or corpse's, 'identity' was obscured by the photographer moving in close, so that the head and face was out of the frame, and the viewer's attention was directed to the specific injury or organ that was the 'subject' of the photograph.¹⁰

On the wall of the room that enclosed his dark room, his office actually, was a large photographic print, pinned to the bulletin board. It showed the torso of a young man, whose penis was being rebuilt after a botched circumcision: the penis so infected that it required amputation.¹¹ The photograph was illustrating a surgical reconstruction. An apron of sewn up incisions made three sides of a square on the landscape of the young man's abdomen — long incisions that presumably permitted surgeons to enter the abdominal cavity, locate the bladder, and attach the yellow tube seen emerging from his pubic area. There was not yet any flesh wrapped around the tube, but there would be, the photographer assured me. Before I could say anything, he smiled and told me that 'No, it didn't work; it was just something to hold on to', as if he had heard the question about sexual function many times.

This display could hardly be termed an exhibit, but nor could it really be called educational, as it was in a photography lab/office not a medical school lecture hall. Located in a space that could neither be termed private nor public, the photograph was not commemorating the birth of a nation, but it was a commemoration nevertheless: it was memorialising a residual culture of appropriation and it functioned as a potent icon of visual privilege, in which the black phallus — the phallus irremediably damaged by 'primitive' Indigenous custom and reconstructed by a 'superior' Western medical intervention — marks

the site of a complex bitterness, a bitterness that might be characterised as a rearguard defiance on the part of those who are slowly yielding power and privilege.

This particular photograph elicited strong reactions from those who saw it, reactions that ranged from the admiration of the transgressive risk of displaying the image as 'art', to deep distaste, borne out of horror felt at castration made visible. According to Mandla Mlotshwa, a local artist, the image magnifies the 'helplessness that black men feel in the hands of white versions of reconstructive narratives',¹² or, said differently, magnifies the helplessness that non-white men feel in the shadow of European contact, conquest, apartheid and post apartheid narratives of power, perhaps what Mbembe is indicating when he refers to the 'public account of ... subjectivity' (3) that the West feels compelled to make, and remake.

The existence of that photograph, on that wall, in that time, might also be compared to the way that 'trophy' photographs, by which hunters memorialise their often mutilated prey, preside over intimate family spaces: the dining room, the lounge, the vacation home. Thus, if patriarchy asserts dominance with fetish objects meant to imply power and lethal force, it does so by first practicing the iconographic definitions of mastery in private settings. The photograph under discussion, in a borderline space between public and private, and between art and science, extends the power-through-image theatrics that move towards a publicly articulated dominance (a dominance whose ultimate stage is large monumentalising art commissions)

If this anaesthetised and then amputated phallus (this unauthorised and impotent phallus, that has been robbed of its generative function but reconditioned in a diminished scale — to be an organ of excretion, an utilitarian appendage whose sole function is 'to empty out' — is made to serve as an iconographic gesture, what is the name of the gesture? And is it accurate to say that this gesture shares cultural space with the painting 'T'Kama Adamastor'?

These are the deformations that Coetzee's painting — and Brink's novel from which it receives its central metaphors — contend with as they 'playfully' deconstruct two particularly troublesome Europeanised tropes which originate in early contact or colonial narratives: the impotent or paradoxically mega-potent, unruly and beastialised black phallus, and the stripped, naked, and vulnerable white woman, shipwrecked on the shores of Africa.

THE CONSOLATION OF TOPOGRAPHY

The Portuguese noblewoman Leonor de Sousa, shipwrecked in 1552 on the coast of Natal (*St. John*), was carried by slaves in a litter for the first several weeks, as the disorganised band of over 400 survivors struggled northeast toward Lourenco Marquez. Thus, even after a perilous 'landing' Leonor was still suspended above the surface of the land, still afloat, as it were. Lying in a hammock

of rugs or Oriental cloths, she swung between the shoulders of four slaves, rocking to and fro. It was as if she were still at sea.¹³ The brief sketch of her story that follows shows how her 'generative capacity' was erased by the anonymously authored contact narrative, and became both an individual sacrifice and a penetrative act of culture. This story, and the other harrowing and dramatic sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese shipwreck accounts available, may well be the 'historical' sources from which Brink built his novella and Coetzee then indirectly built his painting.

According to the account translated in G.M. Theal's *Records of Southeastern Africa*, a number of tragic events brought Manuel de Sousa, the Captain of the *St John*, and his more hardy wife to the point of extremity. The final indignity was a series of casual betrayals that resulted in their indigenous hosts stripping Leonor, her husband, and the rest of the shipwrecked survivors. Here is the phrasing of the anonymous narrator:

[S]eeing herself stripped, [she] cast herself upon the ground and covered herself with her hair, which was very long, while she made a pit in the sand in which she buried herself to the waist, and never rose from that spot.... The men who were still in her company, when they saw Manuel de Sousa and his wife thus stripped, withdrew a little, ashamed. Then she said 'You see to what we are reduced and that we can go no farther, but must perish here. If you should reach India or Portugal at any time, say how you left Manuel de Sousa and me with my children'. (Theal 1898, 1.146)

This dramatic sacrifice can be read semiotically, as a transmutation in which the body refuses (or is made to refuse by the textual authority of an anonymous Portuguese man) a fundamental role and emerges instead as a sign of ultra-chastity. This dramatic gesture, this self-burial, overrides the maternal instinct (her children are abandoned by her immobilising gesture), but it also renders invisible Leonor's generative capacity (her genitals are buried, literally erased from the scene). We are invited to read the gesture as both extreme modesty or strategic protection — from rape, from the sun, from anyone seeing her lower body, even as she is textually engaged in 'seeing herself' and even calls upon the narrator to carry the scene of her final desperate act back to Portugal.

Just as the expiring noblewoman is transformed into the figure of a landlocked mermaid, her body enfolded in the sand, and her children dropped from the narrative, she becomes a death object that is re-invigorated in its moment of death as an active penetration. If this half body suggests a flag of conquest, planted in the sand, or a shaft, sunk for a mine, from which the riches of Africa might be extracted, or even a burial as avatar, then it can be read as an image of virility with which the topography is mastered, even by a white woman, and even in death.¹⁴

If we look back to Coetzee's painting, we see that two Indigenous women who are in water up to the waist echo a similar gesture, with a similar result: an

erasure of their procreative narrative, their reproductive and sexual capacity. This is one of the sacrifices that the European encounter demands, just as the text that records the encounter of the survivors of the *St. John* demands the erasure of Leonor's genitals and the utter embeddedness of her sexual and generative nature in the master narrative of European exploration and conquest.

If the wreck of the *St. John* and the demise of Leonor is one of the most famous disaster narratives of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe (Duffy 25) then this was not merely a matter of the 'event' itself — a staging of the heroic Portuguese battling the dark continent. That a white woman had been in the shipwreck party and that she had been stripped — and possibly abandoned by the more fit seamen in a splitting up of the bands of wanderers — was quite likely one of the most important narrative elements, fuelling the wide distribution and popularity of this tale in Europe.¹⁵

In fact, Ian Glenn proposes that a later shipwreck, the *Grosvenor* (1782) on the Pondoland coast, was the beginning of South African literature, because it provided the occasion for a number of search parties into the hinterland, which in turn gave rise to a number of textual elaborations that sifted the evidence for one overriding concern: whether or not there were still un-rescued white women in the interior, in danger of becoming sexual prey to the Indigene (Glenn 1–3). If, as Glenn proposes, a national literature of South Africa issues from shipwreck narratives, a subset of the general contact narrative, and if national identity issues from a sense of a nation's literature, as Kwame Appiah suggests (53–59), then we would do well to scrutinise with some care the mechanisms by which the textual and visual literature of contact are remade. In cases where the generative body is distorted or erased in order to give birth to a national identity, ironic treatments that reproduce the old tropes in a new surface treatment continue to suggest, among other deformations, that the individual body is rendered sterile, castrated or halved, in order to elevate the mythic assemblage that has come to known as 'nation'.

Coetzee was not mistaken in thinking that he needed a narrative upon which to drape his impressive art historical learnedness and his significant technical skills. There are texts more deeply inflected with the multiple cultures of colonial southern Africa, and even studies of early material culture, which he might have drawn on for the narrative armature of his painting. Because Brink's novella unsuccessfully overturns some of the crudest of early colonial tropes defining the sexuality of the Indigene and the white woman as symbolic unit of exchange, it is a poor source choice for rethinking the colonial encounter in visual terms. When the final panel of a visually dominating national commemorating project is completed, the door shuts rather loudly on an important opportunity to revision a new sense of national identity or colonial past. Had the textual and material culture sources been researched with the same intensity as the European visual sources, had the perspective of the Indigene on early colonial contact been more genuinely

sought, had the dialogue of the artist with his source materials and the dialogue of his painting with its two predecessors advanced beyond the West acceding to its compulsion for public enactments of self-regard, had the bodily representations not followed so dutifully the contours of the colonial tropes that Coetzee meant to challenge and parody, then perhaps we would be discussing a truly post apartheid and postcolonial art work.

NOTES

- ¹ See William Amphlett, *Notes on the Cape of Good Hope*: 'Thirteen or fifteen boatloads... from April 1820 to June 1820' landed in Algoa Bay (122–23).
- ² For a particularly poetic treatment of the 'groundless' imperial exercises of mapping and the accompanying metaphors of land contestation, see Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* and *Lie of the Land*.
- ³ Likewise, of course, American originary myths are built on elaborations of several key nautical miscalculations.
- ⁴ The 'Miscast' exhibition in Cape Town in 1997 is a good example of this. Pippa Skotnes curated an exhibit that included resin casts of 'bushman' bodies, colonial racial measuring devices, and so on. The exhibit was meant to be ironic and subversive, but a number of Khoisan objected on the grounds that it was merely re-enacting colonial violence.
- ⁵ See Lucy Graham's essay presented at the Southern African Texts and Contexts Seminar (April, 2002). Graham's paper contains excerpts from Brink's critique of that novel in which Brink complains that 'Nkosi's problem is that he falls into the traps ... the image of the black male whose awareness of the body obtrudes on every page (including even the assertion of one of the crudest myths of sexist racism, the size of the black penis)...' (qtd in Graham 6).
- ⁶ The existence and location of several southern African *padraos* are covered in Axelson, Theal, and Duffy. The limestone for stone crosses was brought on long sea journeys by the Portuguese and others. Called *Padraos*, they were erected on promontories along the coast of Africa, so that they could be seen from the sea and provide a European landmark for the voyagers that followed. Their location was noted on the *roteiros* or navigational aids of the time.
- ⁷ This phrase is from Daniel Herwitz.
- ⁸ HBI is the acronym for Historically Black Institution, sometimes now referred to as Historically Disadvantaged Institution.
- ⁹ I had asked him if he had thought about exhibiting them, but it turns out that there was a potential problem: he could take unauthorised photographs 'for educational purpose', but he could not use the unsuspecting dead, the fatally injured and the unaware anaesthetised as photographic subjects in that documentary or art exhibit way.
- ¹⁰ In addition to the educational purposes, what might be termed the 'nominal' purpose of such images, there is in existence a body of work done in the United States that deals with 'morgue portraits', murders, corpses, and so on. See the work of Weegee (whose crime scene photographs attained recognition as 'art' in the 1960s) and Andreas Serrano's morgue photos. However, also in the United States, a man was sentenced to eight years in prison in March of 2002 for producing 'morgue shots'. However,

according to the *Cincinnati Mirror*, 'the defence did not let the prosecution's characterisation of the photos as 'garbage' go unchallenged. Cal Kowal, a professor of fine art photography, testified human corpses have been the subject of photos since the beginning of photography in 1839. Photos of the dead are an area of interest in contemporary art, according to Kowal, who cited photographers Andreas Serrano and Joel-Peter Witkin. It is possible that these South African images were made and 'conceptualised' in that way: as some variant of 'art' photography — a perspective that also raises troubling questions about the collaboration, or lack of, by the subjects. It is also quite possible that the photograph was displayed as a critique of adult circumcision, which, in the rural areas, sometimes results in infections and even death.

- ¹¹ I know this from additional image information from a conversation with the photographer, February, 1999.
- ¹² I am indebted to conversations with the artist Mandal Mlothswa about the notion of masculinity, the black man's helplessness in the hands of representational privilege, and his suggestion that the young man's torso grotesquely assumed the visual notation of a 'trophy'.
- ¹³ This and all subsequent references to shipwrecks are to the versions published in G.M. Theal's *Records of South Eastern Africa*, both in the original Portuguese and in an English translation Vol I, II, and VIII (1898–1902).
- ¹⁴ This is perhaps the least corroborated and the most famous incident of all the many striking images of shipwreck survivors. It makes an appearance in Canto V of Camões *Lusiads* (published 1582 in Portugal).
- ¹⁵ In Portugal in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries popular literature was distributed mostly through the printing of pamphlets. These were enormously popular and were widely circulated and translated. Many of these had to do with travellers' experiences. One variant of these pamphlets, called *literatura de cordel*, was printed with popular literature (ballads, religious stories, historical accounts, and so on), was hung by a cord from shops for all to read. Amongst the most widely read and distributed pamphlets were those concerned with exploration and shipwreck accounts, and of these, the account of the survivors of the shipwreck of the *St. John* was one of the most well known. See James Duffy (36–39).

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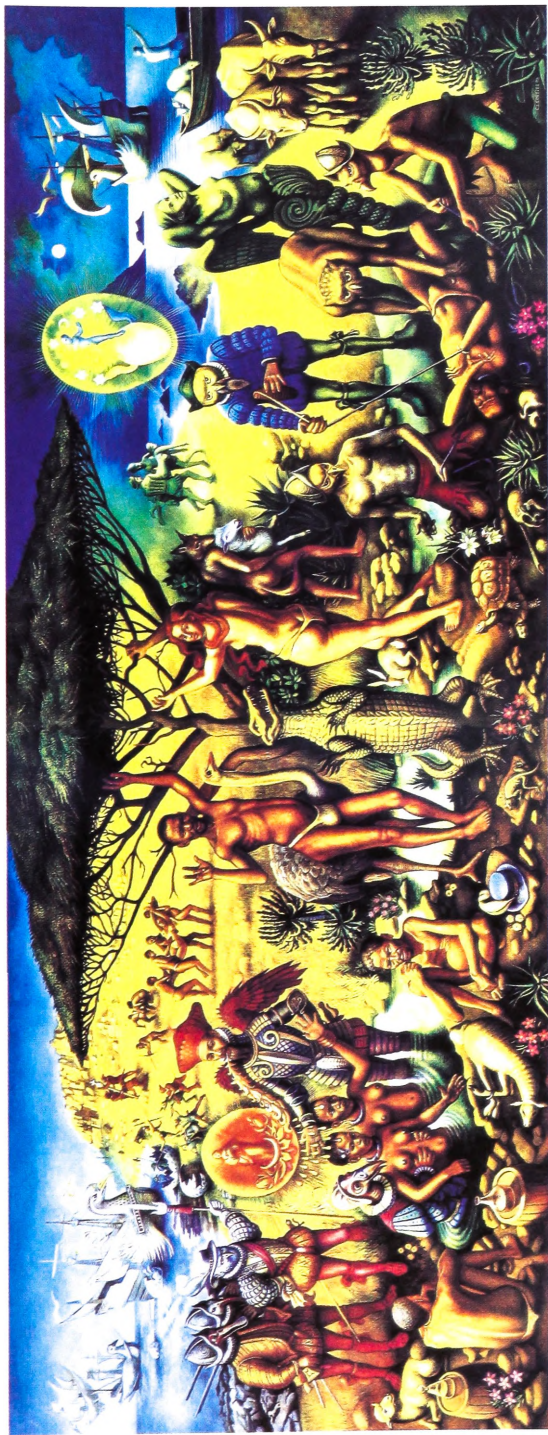
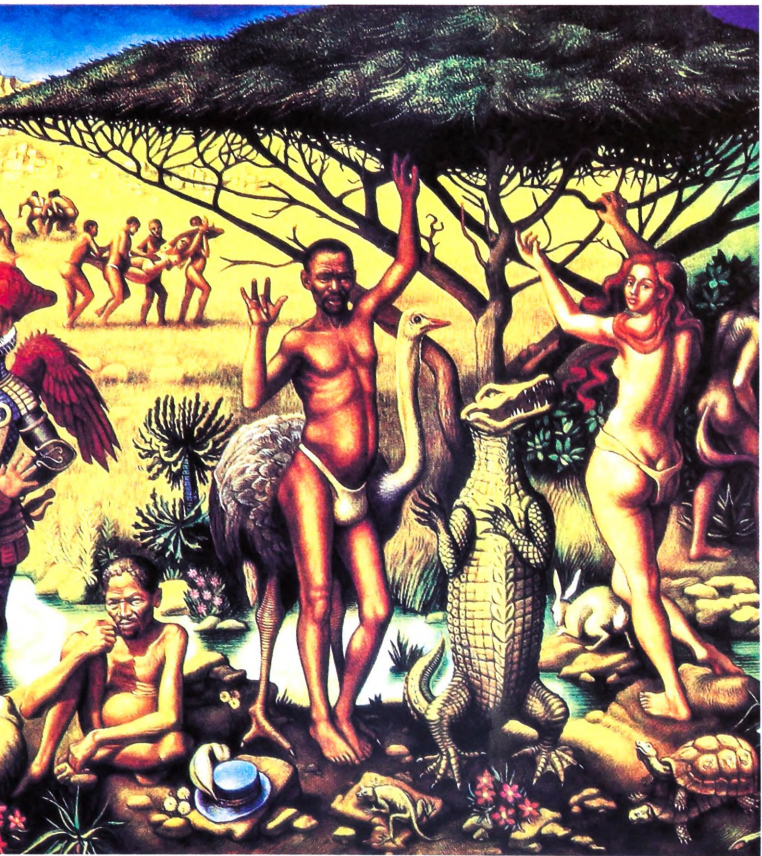


Figure 1. Cyril Coetzee, *T'kama-Adamastor*



Figure 2. Detail A of Cyril Coetzee, *T'kama-Adamastor*



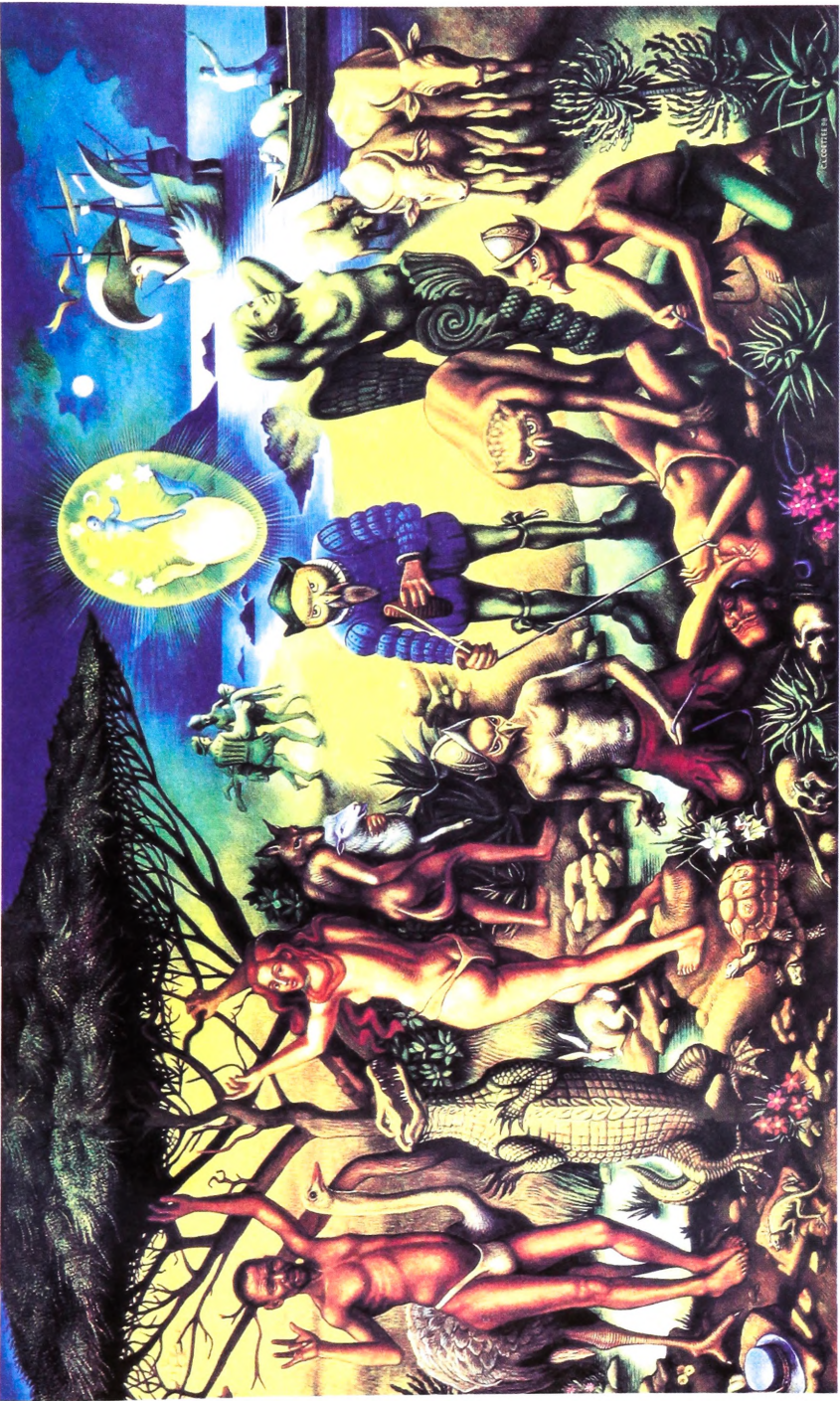


Figure 3. Detail B of Cyril Coetzee, *T'kama-Adamastor*



Figure 4. Detail of Colin Gill, *Colonists*, 1826



Figure 5. Detail of J.H. Amshevitsh, *Vasco da Gama — Departure for the Cape*





Figure 1. *IpiZombi*. Advertisement in Grahamstown National Arts Festival of the Arts Programme, 1999. (Photographer: Obie Oberholtzer.)



Figure 2. Image from *The Prophet*. (Design Brett Bailey; photographer Elsabe Van Tonder.)

Third World Bunfight
presents

THE PROPHET



Company Manager
Barbara Mathers
Assistant Director
Saskia N. Hegt
Musical Coordinator
Phillip Nangle
Photography
Elsabie van Tonder
and Brett Bailey

Third World Bunfight
ABEY XAKWE
Andile Bonde • Boniwe Tyota •
Silulami Lwana • Makhosandile
Yafele • Vuyani Hoboshe •
Nomanenekazi Tyala • Noxy
Donyeli • Xola Mda • Rhea
Cakwebe • Thulani Mene •
Luyanda Butana • Camagweni
Pali • Nomboniso Ebony •
Sonwabo Makhubalo •
Susiwe Dyan •
Tongesayi Gumbo

DRAMA
The Power Station
Time: 19:00
Dates: Sat July 3
Sun July 4
Tues July 6
Wed July 7
Thur July 8
Fri July 9
Sat July 10
No Interval
Duration:
1 hour 40 minutes

written, designed and directed by Brett Bailey

Figure 3. *The Prophet*. Advertisement in Grahamstown National Festival of the Arts Programme, 1999. (Designer: Brett Bailey; Photographer: Elsabe Van Tonder.)

MIKI FLOCKEMANN

Spectacles of Excess or Threshold to the 'New'? : Brett Bailey and the Third World Bunfight Performers

One of the most innovative and controversial presences at the Grahamstown festival over last few years has undoubtedly been Brett Bailey and his Third World Bunfight performers. Both the controversy and innovation are associated with his use of what can be called shock aesthetics, as well as with the subjects dealt with in the plays which he describes as 'worlds in collision'. Looking at some of the pre-and-post-production shots, one gets a sense of what he means when he says, 'I have quite a crude aesthetic ... but I can see what's beautiful underneath the shell' (qtd in Smith, 4). Often these do not represent actual scenes from the plays, but offer suggestive, highly stylised, yet literally embodied images either as freeze-frame tableaux or moving spectacle. For example, the 1999 festival brochure advertising *The Prophet* depicts Abey Xakwe, the protean actor who appears in many guises as central figure in most Bunfight productions, here playing Nongqawuse, posed on top of a hill, Christlike, with arms outstretched. (See figure 3, p. 256.) Observing the hill more closely one sees that it is composed of aesthetically intertwined corpses, seaweed and cattle skulls. Such visual metaphor yoking together Christian sacrifice and the history of the Xhosa Cattle killing is typical of Bailey's work which symbolically and literally intrudes onto culturally sacred ground. However, again typically, this particular image is not necessarily a connection explored in the play itself.

Bailey has been criticised for reinforcing grotesquely parodic stereotypes of Africa but also hailed as showing the way to a new kind of South African theatrical experience. Drawing on indigenous and creolised performance traditions from all over the world, his spectacularly staged works use large casts, including professional performers and locals — children, sangomas, priests and resident choirs who 'perform themselves' — to re-enact historical events in ways that foreground the constructedness of cultural and historical memory. The emphasis seems to be less on what this kind of theatre 'means' than on what it 'puts together', often incongruously, but at a time when there is a public obligation to uncover the truth about South Africa's past and achieve some attempt at reconciliation, or simply closure, such works which unsettle already fragile, contested and even familiar realities, are bound to raise questions. This, in turn, invites discussion of current developments in South African theatre which extends to a broader debate

on the relationships between performance and the processes of democratisation and decolonisation in the context of our often traumatic emergence from the confines of isolation into the spotlight of globalisation.

Given the current preoccupation with the performativity of knowledges, meanings and identities, it is hardly surprising that the end of the millennium saw Bailey and Third World Bunfight staging increasingly ambitious and provocative performative 'enactments' of recent and not so recent histories. The works premiered at the Grahamstown festival from 1996–1999 focussed on particularly bizarre and traumatic events, all located in the Eastern Cape. The first of these, *Zombi* (1996), was a fringe production based on an incident in which twelve schoolboys were killed in a minibus accident near Kokstad in 1995. It was believed their death was no accident, and that witches had turned them into zombies; a witch hunt followed in which three women identified as witches were killed. As a result of the 'unexpected' success of *Zombi*, which was hailed as 'innovative and exciting' theatre and subsequently toured to Cape Town, the next production, *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), was billed as part of the main festival programme, and also had a run at the Market theatre in Johannesburg. This play within a play re-played the much publicised account of Chief Gcaleka's trip to England in search of King Hintsa's skull, the chief claiming that in this time of madness the return of the skull was essential for healing the nation. Then, in 1998, Bailey and Third World Bunfight put on a re-worked version of the earlier play, re-named *IpiZombi*, which played to full houses in the cavernous old Power Station outside Grahamstown. *The Prophet* (1999), Bailey's most spectacularly staged project yet, was based on the Xhosa Cattle killing of 1856 which led to the annihilation of more than 100,000 people. Towards the end of the Grahamstown run of *The Prophet*, Bailey described the play as part of a trilogy dealing with 'states of hysteria' following the collision between African ideas and Western or Christian forces. 'I have had enough of this now', he claimed, 'It's definitely time to move on' (qtd in Mather, 1999: 12). After an absence of a year Bailey's next project has indeed shifted from the local context, though his subject, *Big Dada*, focussing on the career of general Idi Amin, suggests a familiar preoccupation and it will be interesting to see what spin Bailey will give to this history beyond South Africa's borders.

Given the dramatic social transition experienced in South Africa, it is no coincidence that the historical Cattle-Killing saga of 1856–57 has resurfaced in re-imagined ways recently, both locally in works such as Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) (which won the Commonwealth literature award in 2001), and also in a broader diasporic context, such as John Edgar Wideman's *The Cattle Killing* (1997). This is a complexly structured narrative that is haunted by the image of that ritual Xhosa slaughter — 'the starving people, dreamless and broken, dying as their cattle had died' — thus creating a link across Middle Passage, time and space, between the devastated landscape of the South African Eastern Cape,

and eighteenth-century plague-ridden and slave-owning Philadelphia, as well as the slaughterhouse of contemporary gangland, USA:

Shoot. Chute. Black boys shoot each other. Murder themselves. Shoot. Chute. Panicked cattle funneled down the killing chute, nose pressed in the drippy ass of the one ahead. Shitting and pissing all over themselves because finally, too late, they understand. Understand whose skull is split at the end of the tunnel. (Wideman 7).

Apart from the connections that can be made between the 'inexplicable' or spiritual dimension in Bailey's end-of-century trilogy and the social crises of late modernity, also explored in works like Mda's and Wideman's, Bailey's works and the responses to them highlight first, the range (and vehemence) of responses to these productions; and second, the attempts to define or describe the kind of theatre produced; and finally, debates on the function of performance and performativity within the context of postcoloniality and social transformation on various fronts.

The very passion and diversity of responses to Bailey's works suggest that these provide fertile ground for much-needed debate on South African cultural politics for a variety of reasons, not least being the rather startling recent evaluation initiated by the Gauteng education department which recommends the restriction of apparently racist and patronising works such as Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1986), and Mfundo Ndebele's *Fools* (1997) (Maureen Isaacson, *The Sunday Independent* 15 April 2001:1). As argued elsewhere, it seems to me that performance needs to be read 'relationally' — not only in terms of theatrical trends, but also in relation to other forms of cultural production, particularly literary texts.¹ Responses to Bailey's trilogy range from superlatives praising the work's 'authenticity', 'imaginative power', 'energy', its 'healing qualities', as well as its ability to 'haunt' and 'enthrall' the spectators,² to disdain of its 'curio theatre' aspect, its 'overdone' pretentiousness, its being 'too loud', 'too long', 'lacking clarity', its exoticising and 'trivialising of black history', and above all, its being 'anti-thought'.³ Other reviewers, while commending it as a 'brave and worthy' project for involving local communities, for tackling risky topics and for some 'fine singing', nevertheless lament the demagogic aspect referred to as well as its 'inconclusiveness' in terms of interpretations offered.⁴ The most interesting reviews, however, are those that attempt to describe what 'kind' of theatre it is and how it relates to some of the prevailing local, international, and traditional theatre trends. They note amongst other features its operatic use of physical spectacle, myth and African ritual, its emphasis on design and theatrical tableaux; it has also been welcomed by some as an example of 'new' (and indigenous) South African theatre.⁵

On one level it might seem incongruous that Bailey's oeuvre has elicited such intense debate: as one critic puts it rather grudgingly, '[e]verything about Brett Bailey shrieks digeridoo-blowing, teepee-weekending white boy who's managed to coil his tongue around a Xhosa click and thinks he's in heaven'. In fact, she

admits, there is something 'so flea-market fey' and 'Zen gardenerish' about his appearance that it is hard to reconcile this with the fact that 'he looks set to being a contender to transform South African theatre's fortunes' (Smith 3). This points to a comment by John Matshikiza about the use of black iconography by white artists like Robyn Orlin and Bailey. Speaking of the reception of *iMumbo Jumbo* at the Market Theatre in 1997, Matshikiza says that while most white audiences were 'stunned by the spectacle, a bold mix of sangoma ritual, stylised movement and cartoon storytelling', yet, '[m]ost black people [he] spoke to disapproved of exactly those combinations. The bottom line was the perceived lack of respect for black history and culture' (1999a 2). Before looking at the issue of this apparent black/white stratification of audiences and reviewers, which in turn could be related to the 'new ethnicity' associated with late modernity and global economies,⁶ one needs to look at what Bailey himself claims his theatre is attempting to achieve, and additionally to consider debates around performance and performativity.

There is the view that performance is always a re-inscription or enactment of a thing already done, 'always a doing and a thing done' (Diamond 66),⁷ and looked at this way, Bailey's theatre brings 'some sense of our weird reality to the stage' (Matshikiza 1999c: 9). This 'weirdness' is a refrain running through the trilogy. In *IpiZombi* we are told that 'this is a hungry story. The roads are eating our children'. In *iMumbo Jumbo*, we are admonished that the times are out of joint since 'young boys are raping their grandmothers', and in *The Prophet*, a young girl's prophesy leads to the self-destruction of a people. However, this weirdness also extends to an apparently seamless blend of modern technology with ancient rites, and Bailey has drawn on some of Obie Oberholzer's photographs purporting to represent the incongruities of 'world in one country' (Rasool and Witz 336).⁸ As illustrated in the following anecdote, such incongruity is clearly one of Bailey's fascinations. Bailey recounts how, when he phoned Chief Gcaleka at his New Crossroads home to discuss his project for *iMumbo Jumbo*, the chief told Bailey, '[c]ome immediately and bring R50'. When Bailey got to the chief's modest house, 'a goat was being slaughtered [apparently in Bailey's honour], blood foamed on the wall-to-wall carpet, in front of a television where Ridge and Brooke of the popular American soap, *The Bold and the Beautiful* were deeply clinched' (Bailey, qtd in *Cosmoman*, supplement to *Cosmopolitan* April 1998: 33).

If (following anthropological models) one sees performance as a 'liminoid' activity which provides a space or site for performatively exploring alternative possibilities, or even as a site for social and cultural resistance (Carlson 20),⁹ then, instead of seeing performance as primarily referential it can be seen as providing scope for potentialities. This in turn begs questions about the role of theatrical spectacle. For instance, in keeping with Ndebele's much-cited warning about the way spectacles of excess can 'fix' dominant South African hierarchies, there is the view that spectacle confirms rather than challenges chaotic excesses. However, is this necessarily true of performative spectacle? Loren Kruger

comments on the 'impure autonomy of theatre' which, 'as a cultural practice combines in unstable but productive ways aesthetics and politics, autonomy and heteronomy'. In other words, 'theatre straddles the border country between the aesthetic state and the political, and provides the stage on which the contradictions between them can be enacted' (18). Further, since performance essentially involves a consciousness of doubleness, or in this case colonial mimicry (Schneider 264), can spectacle under certain circumstances also function as a threshold to the 'new'?

At the risk of becoming overwhelmed by questions which seem to raise yet further questions, it might be useful at this stage to use my own situated perspective on the works as a point of departure for tackling some of these issues. I was initially interested in exploring the effects of Bailey's aesthetic, and my own mixed responses, rather than in his re-visioning of historical events — though one cannot really separate these, of course. For instance, I was at first rather disconcerted by the way *Zombi* (1996) appeared to invite the very 'curio theatre' critique referred to earlier. Entering the small Arena theatre in Cape Town, we found the sangomas (in this case women who are perceived as having supernatural powers of divination) and assorted actors already present, and as we sat down on straw bales, a spectator (a tourist, judging by his accent) said to his child, 'look son, that's a *real* sangoma'. The setting included a wall and floor covering of washing powder packets worked into an attractive pattern to represent the domestic township interior as well as the containment, as it were, of both consumer and spiritual dimensions within the single space. Both the spectator's comment and the setting were worrying because they seemed to position the audience as a species of cultural tourist, who gazes at a carefully constructed 'snapshot' of South African culture which incorporates the 'primitive' (sangomas) and the modern (kitchen appliances). Was this an instance of what (in a different context) Rasool and Witz refer to as 'providing the tourist with portable histories and an exalted sense of knowing the whole' (336)? Rasool and Witz comment on the way South Africa has, since the 1990s been invited to 'take a place in this international world of images, to imbibe from its media offerings and to become knowing and knowable' (337). Further, located as both 'African' and hence 'tribal' or chaotic, in relation to the West, South Africa, 'unable to escape these parameters ... is having to propound its "Africanness" as the embodiment of the continent's possibilities for modernity' (Rasool and Witz 336). However, as the play progressed, this initial unease was gradually replaced by a sense that expectations were constantly being unsettled in interesting ways. For instance, on the one hand the familiar contrast between traditional, tribal and hence conservative (but also bizarrely cross-dressing) elders and, on the other, the progressive, politically aware youth (usually coded by their school uniforms — perhaps most famously evoked by Sarafina-type images of the 1980s), was here disturbingly skewed when the meeting of the schoolboy comrades employs the register of struggle discourse to discuss witch hunts and reported spirit possession, while remaining a constant feature of parts of the

country, showed a marked increase in the immediate post-election period — and in works presented at the Grahamstown festival as well. It has been suggested that in times of severe social crises, those communities situated on the margins, particularly the rural periphery, articulate 'other' cultural forms (often manifesting as supernatural) to oppose the threat of either industrialisation or the Rational. According to Mary Louise Pratt, 'Indigenous knowledge bases do not simply disappear.... They cannot help but continue to produce meaning and agency, to constitute subjects. They also enter into profound crises' (1999 6). This point is useful in reminding us that, in terms of the play, it is not the roads that are eating the children as suggested in *IpiZombi*, but policing of the transport system, bad roads, poor drivers, profit-hungry owners, unserviced vehicles, and taxi feuds over routes.

The strategy of positioning the spectator as tourist in the original production of *Zombi* (1996) was also interrupted at various points when the staging spilled into the audience in such a way that positioned us (the audience) as participants representing certain belief systems, while the choir (played by a 'real' choir who were simply being themselves) functioned as spectators representing alternative, contrapuntally expressed, value systems. This worked very effectively during the funeral oration, but for me the most powerful moment came when, having all along been made aware of the 'constructedness' of the claims of witchcraft in relation to various interest groups in the community, we are suddenly surprised by the theatrical reality of the zombies (played by children) who emerge eerily from the very cupboard it is claimed they have been kept in, and stalk uncannily amongst us like otherworldly birds, with large painted masks. This serves to force the audience to recognise the existence of others' ideas and beliefs in a graphic way, while not necessarily legitimising any particular belief system.

In the re-worked version, *IpiZombi*, the theatrical effects worked very differently, and in my opinion, in many respects less effectively. Instead of the containment and juxtaposition of the domestic and otherworldly spheres, the setting was designed to draw the audience more completely into an 'other' world. Even physically, one had to travel some distance outside the town in the 'Heebie-Jeebie shuttle' to the disused Power House where the action took place on an earth floor around an open fire, the air thick with the aroma of burning herbs. However, despite this emphasis on drawing one into the 'other' reality, there were still moments where perceptions were destabilised in a way starkly different to Brechtian alienation. In an early scene, there is a powerfully drummed trance dance by the sangomas. Instead of destabilising the familiar, here the emphasis was on revealing the power of the 'other' world, since the advance publicity informed us that several of the sangomas were literally in a trance state, raising speculation about the relationship between performance and ritual; or, as Okagbue puts it, 'playing or praying' (92–93). The 'authentic' sangomas were dancing in front of what appeared to be a Christianised altar, reminiscent of West Indian

voodoo, or creolised Latin American churches. When the cloth used to cover the 'host' was removed a white plinth-like column was revealed, crowned by a polished ebony statue of the upper torso of an African gracefully holding a carved fruit bowl above his head — something one would associate with colonial drawing rooms rather than a church. Just when one is adjusting to the incongruity achieved by this aesthetic, the aesthetic literally takes off when the statue (played by Abey Xake) shuffles off with small steps, his body confined by the plinth structure.

It is at moments like these that I think Bailey's work is most successful, because in such aesthetically achieved incongruities, the tourist gaze is satirically undercut, refusing the 'fixing' which was my initial concern. There is humour in reminding us that South Africa is neither entirely 'knowing or knowable' and this recalls the comment by Loren Kruger about the 'impure' nature of theatre which inhabits the boundary between the aesthetic and the political state. However, as mentioned earlier, it is also this inbetweenness that critics find so frustrating since it appears to resist conclusions and meanings on the one hand, and on the other, ignores 'real' historical facts. (For example, scientific evidence has 'proven without a doubt' that the skull Gcaleka has brought back from Scotland was in fact not that of King Hintsa after all.) Does this not, however, miss the point, since the work itself is 'performing' the contradictions involved in the processes of postcoloniality?

Having said this, there is still the sense that there can be something quite tricky about the way Bailey's work 'plays with' images and ideas that are then exported back and forth between third and first world (Accone 12). For instance, in a photograph by Obie Oberholzer accompanying an article about the play, three bare-breasted women (sangomas/witches?) with colourful sarongs around their waists — but with masked and obscured faces — are situated in apparent dancing stances in front of towering cactuses (Knox, 1). This photograph provides an interesting subtext — or is it confirmation? — of the objectification and even fetishisation of women who are the victims of the witch hunts depicted in the play. In the earlier play, *Zombi*, the slaying of the first woman targeted by the community, led by the young school-uniformed comrades, was represented in slow motion, suggestive of a brutal and brutalising, ritualised rape. In the later version, however, the killing of the witches appeared somehow less brutal because of the way the event was represented within the context of the 'other' world. Similarly, the appearance of the zombies too had less surprise effect for the same reason. This suggests the dynamic and unstable aspect of the meanings made by the audiences which are in turn determined by the aesthetic and in this case, site-specific performance strategies. A further problem (for some) is Bailey's use of prepubescent girls dancing 'without their shirts on' as some viewers put it and which they found deeply disturbing given the prevalence of sexual abuse of young children.¹⁰ My own feelings here are similarly mixed, since the children are put 'on display' by Bailey as director, whereas the older women have, one assumes,

chosen to put themselves on display by participating in the project. However one responds, one seems to fall into some kind of aesthetic 'trap', caught up in the traffic of images between developing and developed worlds. Looked at another way, perhaps, it is perfectly appropriate to feel uncomfortable given one's cultural and ideological position.

Each play uses different strategies for penetrating the invisible fourth wall. In *Zombi* the spectator/performer positions were unsettled, both literally and figuratively, while in *iMumbo Jumbo*, the elision between performer and spectator extended to the 'real' history which it was re-playing. For example, in the performances at the Grahamstown Festival that I attended, the audience gradually became aware that some of the spectators sitting amongst us in the local community hall were invited guests who were not 'playing', but had actually participated in the excursion to Scotland to retrieve the ill-fated ancestral skull. Towards the end of the performance the priest who accompanied the wily Chief was invited to address the audience which he does with great dignity and without any sense of irony (considering that the skull is not the skull it is thought to be). *iMumbo Jumbo* is perhaps the most overtly ironic of the plays in terms of the way images are exported back and forth, which could also explain why it has been the most commonly reviewed. However, the most sustained inversion of spectator/performer interactions occurred in the final play of Bailey's trilogy which premiered at the Grahamstown Festival, consisting of *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), *IpiZombi* (1998) and *The Prophet* (1999)..

Like *IpiZombi*, *The Prophet* was performed at the Power House venue outside Grahamstown. On arrival, the audience was requested to wait while the venue was 'prepared'. When finally allowed into the playing space, they filed in, through a tunnel lined with political party posters of smiling and scowling candidates from various political groupings, which provided a sobering reminder of the scale of political events in our recent history, and created the sense of entering a passage from the present to the past. Or was this intended to suggest how 'unreadable' that past is? The audience was then ushered into the large high-ceilinged space which already felt strangely crowded. Along the sides of all four walls were raked seats, and in the middle of the space a raised platform. The seating was described as 'unconventional', in that the 'old and infirm' were seated on chairs staggered around the four edges of the room, with the younger members on the ground in the middle, with a circular alleyway running between. Those who chose the old and infirm seats higher up later became aware that seated amongst them were what appeared to be immobile statues/meditative figures, all differently attired, with eyes obscured by an assortment of goggles and sea shells. Were these the silent but breathing spirits of the ancestors? The ubiquitous Bailey children were covered in blankets behind a makeshift screen in a corner of the room, including, for the first time, three blond-haired boys of settler descent. An extraordinary effect was created by this seating arrangement, since looking around the room,

spectators saw themselves looking at other spectators seated amongst the ancestors, breaking the invisible barrier between audience and performer, between here and then, and between us and them. Two performers appeared who seemed to act as stage managers, a man and a woman. The music began: sung as a liturgy, it told the familiar story, but emphasised the circularity of history as indeed did the staging itself with its circular seating. The ancestral singing was neither recognisably African nor European, beautifully choreographed and punctuated by the occasional kudu or seaweed horn.

As a distancing device, Bailey uses the children to tell the story: of the devastating Xhosa Cattle Killing of 1856–57, which followed the prophesy of the young girl Nongqawuse who advised that no crops be planted, and that all the cattle be slaughtered in anticipation of the liberation from the control of white settlers.¹¹ Throughout the play one has a strong sense of communal outrage at the fact that it is a mere 'girl' who makes the prophesy. Nongqawuse's head is covered by a zebra skin, her sister-friend is the one who brings the message, a message that, oddly, Nongqawuse (played by Abey Xakwe) also hears broadcast through the portable radio she holds to her ear. There is a strong sense at times that one is watching an amateurish school play, and the king's voice is recognisably a childlike imitation of Mandela's. While some felt that the use of children to tell the story trivialised the event, Bailey says he chose this because, as he puts it, '[c]hildren bring innocence, sweetness and life into this story', a story which is perhaps too hard to tell otherwise? And to disarm those who might think he is presenting the story as 'childish' he had the British soldiers played by the three blond children too (qtd in Mather 12). John Matshikiza says that the use of the children provides an interesting critique on the festival itself, in that '[Bailey's] storytelling urchins are a bizarre mirror of the gangs of street kids singing cheekily for their supper in the streets of the festival town.... But they do not own the festival. They are their own wry comment on the whole thing' (1999b: 9). Here an interesting outsider's perspective on the use of children as storytellers is suggested by Eastern European critic, Kalina Stefanova, who sees this device as a very effective for of theatrical 'grotesque': 'In a time when wars look, and for some even may feel, like games not taking into consideration their devastating consequences, this directorial choice gave the show a very unexpected impact in the long run — an impact of an extremely topical grotesque' (194–95).

Bailey claims that his work is about 'giving a slant on reality, not about reflecting the whole of reality' and in this way he attempts to balance the rational and the mythical (qtd in Matshikiza 1999b, 1). In the play, the stage manager-actor seems to function as a voice of balancing reason as she remonstrates against the extravagance of the prophesy, but when, despite her warnings, all have succumbed to it, it is she who sings the haunting lament over the dead and chases away the gloating vultures stalking amongst them (played by the settler-soldier children). On one hand Bailey suggests this is a millenarian fantasy appropriate

to the times we are living in; on the other, it is, we are told, 'a sad story but uplifting in the telling' — a transformative aesthetic. He claims that his intention is not to open an old wound in order to demonise Nongqawuse; instead, 'his interest is in helping to heal. It is his belief that his style of ritualistic theatre where the performers themselves achieve some state of mesmerisation, and the audience is drawn in as active participant, complete with the aura of incense and medicinal herbs, is part of this healing process' (Matshikiza 1999, 1). It can be argued that this suggests the return to a pre-Enlightenment notion of aesthetic experience, or *aesthesis* which, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, was originally a discourse of the body, and referred to 'the whole region of human perception and sensation' (13) [emphasis added].

However, as mentioned previously, one of the common criticisms of Bailey's work is that in the emphasis on visceral spectacle and ritual he is 'anti-thought'; the kind of spectacle presented obscures the real forces at play, mystifying what are in fact traumatic historical events. After all the 'myth and mystery and smoke 'n mirrors storytelling' what are we left with, asks Adrienne Sichel (1999 2), apart from images that keep bubbling to the surface of our consciousness? Bailey claims that he and Third World Bunfight concentrate on 'developing and uncovering a rich theatre aesthetic and language from South African soil, fertilised with outside ideas and methodology' (qtd in *Daily Dispatch*, 3 Feb 1998: 10). This comment is interesting in view of the discussion earlier about both the referential or the 'liminoid' potentiality of performance, as well as speculation about the kind of theatre he is producing. For instance, 'developing and uncovering' suggests the already 'done', whereas the growth metaphor of 'fertilisation' suggests the creolised form that will result from this interaction. Outlining the kinds of meditation techniques he uses to prepare his performers, Bailey says, 'I believe that theatre can be like ritual: an event that incorporates all people involved — performers and audience — and which affects people at profound levels of consciousness' (1998 191). Bailey mentions the influence of both Xhosa trance-dance forms, as well as Japanese Noh theatre, and Eastern theatre styles. He has also been strongly influenced by Artaud, Boal, Grotowski, Brook and Jung. All of these influences are of course evident in his work — particularly Artaud's emphasis on ritualistic physicality of performance, and his avant-garde, modernist preoccupation with the primitive, but there are also other ways of looking at Bailey's aesthetic and methodology, beyond the movements associated with these figures. One of these is Eugenio Barba's 'third theatre' which is neither institutional nor avant-garde and stresses the autonomy of meaning for the action achieved through a network of relationships between actors and spectators.¹² In fact, Bailey strongly rejects the association of his work with the avant-garde, for these practitioners often 're-invent' the 'primitive' or the 'other' in response to the scientific ethos of modernity. Bailey instead draws on viable heritages that are part of an existing performance continuum. This is why Zakes Mda sees Bailey's

work as an example of 'total theatre' that combines many traditions, predominantly harvested from African ritual 'but redefined in a most creative manner that leaves one breathless' (1998 6). This last point suggests that the stratification of audiences' and reviewers' responses is not as Manichean as Matshikiza suggests. No doubt there are elements of all these influences present in Bailey's work, but the cultural and regional specificities of his work and performers ensures slippage beyond any of these categories. Importantly though, it must not be forgotten that Bailey is not just 'tapping into' these traditions — the 'fertilisation' process is not a natural one, it requires hard work and extraordinary discipline to achieve the performed hysteria at the heart of the trilogy. (This discipline was perhaps best illustrated in *Heartstopping*, a short work in which the ancestors offer their hearts to the spectators. This work without words only had two performances in 1998, one at the old Settler graveyard where the ancestors appeared appropriately from behind the gravestones; after they were banned from that hallowed site they moved to the disused shunting yard where they put on a different but equally powerful performance.)

Despite the criticism that Bailey's work is 'anti-thought', the emphasis on African spirit possession and ritual in his work can be read as effectively placing those generally marginalised realities at the centre in a way that makes it difficult for the spectator to maintain the position of cultural voyeur because of the affective force of the spectacle. Awam Ampka has argued for theatre as 'a space for translations', saying that the only way that 'a reified Eurocentric logic can be challenged is by the subject residing at the centre [literally and perhaps metaphorically] in order to disrupt the apparently stable norms of (neo)-colonialism' (qtd in Imoru 114). According to Bailey, his plays are 'not just sensational stories, they're also attempts to revise, re-think and re-structure the nature of South African theatre today', and criticising the way theatre has been reduced to an 'audio-visual display' he says, 'South Africa does not have to emulate this.... We can express ourselves in our own voices, with all the fervour, trauma and vitality of the developing nation that we are' (qtd in O'Hara 5)

To return to the question of 'newness' that has been associated with Bailey's work: where then is the 'newness' located? Perhaps it is in the collisions of worlds, or ideas and beliefs, where the familiar is destabilised so that one is seduced by or forced to contemplate alternatives. Is it the controversy and the vehemence of the responses to the works that generate newness? Or it is the playfulness, self-consciously contrived though it is at times, that refuses the fixities of the new ethnicities? Can the 'performance zone' (see Okagbue) serve as a meeting ground where cultural specificities are themselves 'unfixed' in a strange re-working of the contact zone between cultures referred to by Mary Louise Pratt (1992)? Or does newness reside in images that are exported back and forth, forcing constant translation and re-reading in a way that is unsettling, not as a Brechtian *Verfremdung*, but in terms of a specific South African experience? Perhaps this is

the most significant aspect of Bailey's work — the traffic of images and symbols playing between performers and audience, between developing and developed worlds, not in order to deconstruct, or endlessly defer meaning, but to suggest new ways of being, ways that have not yet materialised, nor yet even been fully imagined? One way of looking at Bailey's theatre, then, is in the terms he suggests, as itself an expression of 'the fervour, trauma and vitality of the developing nation that we are' (qtd in *Vuka*, 2.6, 1999, 4–5).

Notes

- ¹ For instance, instead of concentrating on 'newness' in play scripts, reading these in relation to other genres, particularly fiction, can establish a useful dialogue that offers scope for re-reading both the fiction and the performance ('The Aesthetics of Transformation: Reading Strategies for South African Theatre in the New Millennium').
- ² Interesting here is that praise for the 'authentic' aspect comes from a critic from Eastern Europe. Kalina Stafanova who has followed Bailey's work since *Zombi* in 1996, notes that she has seen similar productions, by theatre gurus like Eugenio Barba which also use spiritual séance, 'In comparison to *The Prophet* they look and sound no more real than the pseudo-channelling of Whoopie Goldberg in the famous movie *Ghost*. To me, the Brett Bailey show is still the closest the theatre has come to the reality of the unreal' (194–95). See also Darryl Accone, 'iMumbo Jumbo opts for a selective reality in devising theatre for the millennium'; Adrienne Sichel, 'Conjuring with Cultures and Myths'; Simpiwe Piliso, 'Tikoloshe, Why Are You Under My Bed?', and Solomon Makgale, 'Tapping into the Power of the African Spirit'.
- ³ For example, Vukile Pokwana feels that history has been badly served through the way the account of the self-proclaimed Xhosa Chief Gcaleka has been 'shabbily reinvented in a theatrical ritual'. It 'fails to accurately depict the details surrounding the expedition'; indeed, it 'fails to escape the donga of hype and sensationalism' (34). For Mfundo Ndebele it is ironic that Bailey celebrates indigenous cultural aspects: 'The portrayal of half-naked, bare-breasted blacks with bodies smeared with animal fat and clay, suggests a time-freeze in black advancement. The play feeds on white prejudice and widespread ignorance about contemporary blacks in South Africa'. In fact, says Ndebele, middle class blacks might be embarrassingly reminded of the 'backward' past they want to leave behind. But then rather oddly he adds, 'All the same, it highlights the thinking and behaviour patterns of a marginalised but significant sector of the population' (21). See also, Zia Mohamed, 'Cheap Tricks and White Lies'.
- ⁴ See also, Bongani Nododana, 'Fine singing, unsubtle acting mark *Zombi*'; Glyn Spaans, '*Zombi* with great gusto: but how long can zeal last with a chant'.
- ⁵ It is interesting to distinguish the reviewers who see theatre in terms of performance traditions and genres, from those for whom it is an aspect of sociology or history like Ndebele and Pokwana. For instance, Zakes Mda himself a theatre practitioner, commends Bailey's work as pointing to new directions in 'total theatre' (1998 6), while Darryl Accone claims that at best 'it is truly new and genuinely South African theatre for the next millennium' (12). Robert Greig, refers to Bailey as 'the best thing in South African theatre today', noting that this panoramic theatre breaks new ground:

- while it remains close to rural rather than urban roots, the works are 'moving designs, rather than stagings' creating new directions in hybridisation (12).
- 6 According to Livio Sansone not everything about the 'new ethnicity' of late modernity is really new. Commenting on the way 'Africa' has been a contested icon in Brazil, 'used and abused by both high-and low-brow cultures, by popular and elite discourse on the nation', Sansone says: 'in a world where the "value" of ethnic cultures and identities is their distinctiveness vis-a-vis Western urban culture, black cultures do not enjoy the official recognition of "established ethnic cultures"' (7). This has some relevance for the way rural or marginalised communities in South Africa, while part of an ethnic majority, might feel similarly excluded. On the other hand, for some, says Sansone, 'in a society on the periphery of the West wanting to be increasingly rational', certain forms of 'aestheticised blackness' are 'the expression of a popular yearning for the exotic and sensual — associated with black people' (17).
 - 7 Diamond says that while 'common sense insists on a temporal separation between a doing and a thing done, in usage and theory, performance drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory', but, 'On the one hand, performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self). On the other hand it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field' (66)
 - 8 See Oberholzer's *Raconteur Road: Shots into Africa* (1997). Though Rasool and Witz are not referring to Oberholzer, they comment on the way the re-formation of the South African polity and social fabric in the 1990s led to the consolidation of a set of tourist images which boldly proclaim South Africa as 'a world in one country' (1996 336).
 - 9 Marvin Carlson discusses Victor Turner's model of performance (which in turn draws on Van Genep's notion of performance as a rite of passage — moving from one social situation to another) in terms of its in-betweenness, its function as transition between two states. This emphasises performance itself as a border, a margin, a site of negotiation, even a space for creating 'new culture' (20).
 - 10 Between 1997–1999 I accompanied 'study-abroad' students from Northwestern University to Bailey productions, and this topic come up each year.
 - 11 Bailey mentions that he drew on sources such as Jeff Peires' *The Dead will Arise* (Ravan Press 1989), and Helen Bradford's critique of Peires. He has also included extracts of H.I.E. Dhlomo's *The Girl who Killed to Save* (*Nongqause: The Liberator*) in the play.
 - 12 Ian Watson describes the sociology of Eugenio Barba's third theatre as follows: 'Unlike either institutional theatre or the avant-garde, in which the emphasis is on producing, reflecting, and/or distributing culture, the focus in third theatre is on relationships: on the relationships between those in a particular group, on their relationship to other groups, and on their relationship with the audience. This focus on the network of relationships in third theatre has its foundation in the individual and his/her role in the collective' (243). See also Stefanova's comment (note 2 above).

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ROSE RICHARDS

Luvandwar

Our reporter at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings in the Western Cape today has confirmed the TRC's continued intention to thoroughly investigate the claims of all applicants for blanket amnesty in the wake of widespread protests following the TRC's latest findings. Closer to home, fires continue to rage out of control in the Boland, where the highest temperatures in fifty years have been measured. A fire warning has been issued to people living in the Helderberg area and many electrical services have been rendered useless by massive blackouts in the Cape Town metropole. A spokesperson of the principal electrical supplier explained that burning ashes on the main cables are thought to have played a role. Linda Botha is on the spot bringing you an eyewitness report....

Above and below the crackling battery-radio signal, the evening is January hot, the ashy residue of a scorching day in which I have stayed in my shoes, in my clothes, in my office, in my smile. The sky has burnt itself out through cobalt, through hyacinth and jacaranda to lilac and bleached hibiscus. I am sitting barefoot on my stoep in Macassar Street now, drinking lukewarm tea and listening as night pads into the Cape of Good Hope, chasing out the cicadas and the non-indigenous colours of the day.

Drinking tea as I am, alone, instead of taking it as you do in public, still requires the ceremony of kettle and pot, cup and saucer, sugar and milk the way I used to make it for my mother. Luckily I managed to set up the ceremony before the mains tripped out once and for all. As I reach again for the plastic milk carton, I consider that I might have been the reason the house's mains shorted. After all, I was at the computer when it happened. I started with small energy surges, shortly after my mother died, making static on the radio and gradually moving up to snowstorms on TV and computer screens hanging whenever I tried to draw up the Liquidation and Distribution Account for her Estate. And, most recently, since my father started phoning me from the States, my light bulbs have been popping, especially the hall light above the telephone where he catches me unawares.

And now for a word from our sponsors....

Africa hums with electricity and commerce, brighter than television, crackling with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, satellite news and biodegradable plastic shopping bags. It has recently discovered capitalism, the middle classes and luvandwar. But things look different in the light of the fire. Daylight is a thin

and glossy coat, like jolly tabby stripes unwisely applied to the back of a sleeping lion. A coat so easily taken off. Speaking for myself, my daytime life is a semi-lucid dream compared with my boiling night-sea aflame with the summer evening of my mother's death.

Tune in later this evening with me, Mike Collins and radio K9, for our documentary on tribal rituals in Mpumalanga. There will be an in-depth report on the success of the Witchcraft Commission in that province and this will be followed by a discussion on the use of ash in initiation rites.

There are ashes in everything. I was initiated into adulthood with my mother's ashes. They sit in front of me in a brown cardboard box, between the milk and the ant-proof sugar bottle. I am going to take them with me tonight. The fire roars on the mountain behind my house. No one knows how it's got into the Nature Reserve. It may as well have leapt out of the ground. That acrid bitterness in the air is fynbos burning — the fall of the sixth floral kingdom.

We will continue to keep Capetonians posted about the fires in their region. At present the major threat is posed by smoke inhalation, especially for asthma sufferers. Any asthma sufferers should be aware that the emergency units at all major hospitals are on standby, but please don't wait until your condition is out of control before taking action. Now, back to the music....

The sun spreads into burnt treacle. Birds become bats that swoop and chirp on naked wings. I look towards Orion and the Southern Cross — but I cannot see them through the haze. The streets are silent now that the cicadas have gone. I pour more tea into my willow pattern cup while my mother's reflection glints from the teapot, haranguing me for not changing the light bulb at the front door while it was still day. 'Now you'll have to come home alone in the dark,' she says. The electricity is off, I remind her. Burning ashes on the cables, the radio says. Could be off for hours. It is real night — solid darkness except for the ruddy glow over Franschhoek across the mountains.

Please be careful if you start a fire and be particularly sure that your cigarette butts are out before you throw them into any brush. Remember — when it comes to fire, prevention is better than cure....

I light a candle. For days, helicopters have been flying with drums of water clutched under their bellies to dump on the flames. But now that their whine is gone, along with the cicadas, we can hear the fire growl and rumble and snap its jaws. For five days, we've beaten it back, for five nights it's savaged the fynbos and torn at the trees. Our town lies below, dark and silent. The fire tosses its mane in the smoky air and roars. It's still hungry and the lights are still out. The sixth floral kingdom is almost gone and now the rocks must stand alone. The radio sings about sex and luv. I scowl it into static.

In the absence of electricity, the darkness bleeds out of everything — the houses and roads and people. Especially the people. Their hopeful windows are swallowed up in night. The radio squeaks defiantly and pops something about a big bush fire out of control near Franschhoek before the signal is lost in an electrical blizzard. Something is burning nearby with inhuman hunger. Something big.

Ssssss....

Last year, on a smoky night like this, time ended, and began and luvandwar melted in the furnace of my heart. That was the year the fire ate my Mother. She collapsed in the garden on a luring evening. She couldn't breathe and then her heart burst. She was quickly taken by luvving hands to a crematorium on the outskirts of dusty Industria in a pauper's coffin and cranked into the furnace under a purple cloth, then given back to me in this shoebox. Nothing but ashes. No one speaks of her now. She never did fitin and her death was the final gaffe.

I was there that evening in the garden when my mother fell, but I was not strong enough to catch her. Her body slipped through my arms like a fish and fell to the ground, while her soul flew off like a bird. And I was left alone in between to explain to the ambulance men, to the doctors, to the police. The doctor 'was not prepared' to sign a death certificate. He had not witnessed her death. It had not been according to form. I thought of having to look for her missing spirit in the dark and how it would elude me as I tried to catch it and bring it to show him that it really had got out. Even if I managed, how would he force her quicksilver back into her body and make it stay there? She had wanted to fly away above the oncoming fire and water for a very long time, ever since losing at luvandwar.

But she came back to see if I was all right and I caught her by the tail. So now our house is a home again. I trapped my mother's face in the gleam of the teacups and her hair in the musk of the dried hydrangeas in the front room. I keep her sighs in the chimney. I smell her tomato stew on the stove. I made some for supper, before remembering I was eating out.

'Let me go,' she begs in the chimney, but I've made sure I've tied her down properly this time.

She may be ready, but I am not.

After her death my father started to call. He had disappeared to America with his new wife who luvved us as if we were her own. She is a very luvving woman who does her best to make up for all the luv he didn't get from my mother. Seems things are different in America. The electricity is on always and there are no ashes in the air. People don't get eaten by lions. Not only did my father call, but my stepmother also wrote to tell me how she understood my loss. Her parents (still alive) sent their luv too. Now my father's back in Cape Town on a conference and has decreed that I am to make time for him one night. Tonight. Ashes whirl down on me.

'Go and see your father,' my mother cajoles, 'didn't I tell you he'd warm to you after I died? You must have a relationship with him — he's all you have left.'

The bricks are hot beneath my feet. On the mountain leaves scream and rocks burst.

So I steel myself for the Reconciliation gulag and for the smooth, foreign language of *luvandwar*. I shall have to fight the snow-sickness while my stepmother explains that my father worked his finger to the bone and that my mother and I got our just desserts. That I would have got more money and a start in life if only I had been more *luvving*. My father and stepmother are always careful to show that *allsfair* and not to dwell on the war. You take the child; we'll take the business. You take the bread; we'll take the wine. We'll take the *luv*; you take the war. Who shall get the Truth, who shall get the Reconciliation? As I'm waiting for their decision, after the dry hugs are doled out and the cold table napkins fall onto numb laps, I shall feel my extremities growing heavier and duller. The coldness shall creep up my limbs through my blood vessels until it leaks into my heart. Then I shall go to sleep forever.

My mother would not fit in or be part. She did not play the game. She did not believe in *luvandwar*. Especially not in *luv*. But other people did. She would not have short, curled hair and prominent eye shadow. But other people did. She would not buy timeshare or remarry or make small talk or work from nine to five. So she lost out in *luvandwar*. How could she win against a native speaker who had Neat Handwriting and put circles above her I's, like little haloes on toothpicks, who laughed a successful-woman laugh — hoo hoo hoo — like the clucking of fowls and painted her eyebrows onto her doll-smooth face? My mother's reflection in the mirror is still trapped in misery — her soft face sagging, her legs unshapely, wearing her age like a disgrace beneath her men's shirts.

'I don't want to get old,' she said once while watching a programme about Alzheimer's on TV.

She died at fifty nine.

'But I'm still here,' she says wearily, 'long past my expiry date'. And her ghostly laugh sounds like the wind snagged in a tree.

— *Where is the country going, I ask? What is to become of the youth of today?*

— *Yes, thank you, Myrna from Paarl. Next up is Jodie from Stellenbosch and hallo Jodie....*

Last year, someone with a shotgun shot all the road signs between Cape Town and Grabouw. The 'C' of Cape Town was blown away and now we go to 'APE TOWN'. The darkness is thickening. The air is muggy. On the radio, fire warnings and progress reports remind us that the lion is stealing up on the farms and wine lands. Domestic animals cower before his hot breath that reeks of savage captivity too long unfed. He won't play by the rules. He doesn't believe in *fairsfair*. He has no respect for *luvandwar*.

Dinner at the Entrecôte with my father. Just like old times. Prawns, steak, imported wine. He will shovel his hardearned rewards into his frog-lipped mouth with his cold smooth surgeon's hands. Eat, eat, he will say, have a dessert. Your father, my stepmother will say, dissecting her roll with long red talons, has worked his finger to the bone. I shall try not to hear the echo of her thoughts about my mother. I shall be escorted, wide-eyed, to the buffet table mountain of verdant salad forests and bready outcrops and instructed to dig in. I shan't be able to choose — at home I am unused to such variety. I shall want to make the best of all the food, but will be overwhelmed by it and forced to remember, when they tell me how little I deserve their generosity, how my father fell in sex with my stepmother, how she fell in meal ticket with him, how they both called this new state of affairs *luv* and how much of our lives they were prepared to sacrifice for their freedom. Crisp napkins and tablecloths will froth around us. Sleek glossy waiters will glide in shoals; soft music will wash over us while the food comes wave on wave and I will feel myself dwindling beneath the plenty.

Do you think, professor, that the high incidence of zombies in Mpumalanga has any relation to so-called witches or is it a crisis reaction caused by ideas imported from the West meeting ancient African customs?

Luvandwar will fall in perfect snowflakes and cover everything. I will come full of thistles and burrs to the feast, as a fierce, feral child full of rage and hunger and leave empty, unable to eat, because of what I will have to swallow with the prawns and steak and *crème brûlée*. Luvandwar will snuff my fire and my angry tongue will die dumb in my ashy mouth. I may not have the strength to drag myself out of the snowy depths before I die snow-blind and hypothermic. I am tired of *luvandwar* and of my stepmother who has hair of spungold and a perfect manicure. I am tired in my bones.

A quick reminder to our listeners not to travel anywhere tonight if you do not have to — visibility is poor. Several people have already been reported missing in the Helderberg area. If you know their whereabouts, please call your nearest police station. They are as follows....

I wonder what will happen if they can't control the fire, where it will go if it isn't stifled. It may leap over the mountains and the TRC, across the dusty grainlands of Mpumalanga, freeing up the witches and bringing the zombies back to life, then on to our arid neighbours, and eat and eat its way north, snarling and devouring ancient Egypt, Turkey, Greece, growing bigger and fiercer and hungrier the more of *luvandwar* that it sees. I see it making a meal of Europe, then poisoning itself to spring across the sea and gobble up rare rednailed stepmothers and lesser-spotted fathers.

Yes, folks, this is the hottest summer in fifty years....

Snug with their Entrecôte reservation in APE TOWN, while the world is burning down, my father and his wife order dinner. Perhaps they have already started to eat. I was expected an hour ago and yet I cannot stir. Instead, I pour another cup of tepid tea to ease the rasping in my throat. Bringing the cardboard box was my only weapon against luvandwar. I wanted it at the table. I wanted to see their faces, when I revealed its gritty contents. Something deep inside me growls at the thought of steak then stops. What if my father and stepmother think I'm asking for their help in scattering the ashes? The light has turned grey and yellow. Big, black cinders whirl around me. The major roads leading to the city are declared hazardous and the minor ones are impossible. Well, I guess that's that, as far as APE TOWN goes. I haven't had my driving license a year yet. I'll tell them I wouldn't feel safe driving into a disaster. The radio remarks that the phone lines are dead now too.

In the blackness of the burning night, the mountains behind me are rimmed with rage in the smoke and the moon rises red, looming through a caul that would have hidden the sun, until it hangs before me, gory and unnatural. Cat-face and lion's blood. What is wrong with the night? The radio said nothing about this. This is definitely not my doing. Ashes whirl down on me like swarming killer bees. My head hums with electric pain. I can hardly breathe. I hear a panting sound all around me. Dry, dry, dry. A lion's rasp in a lion's throat in a land where all the lights have gone out. Unclimatic thunder grumbles over Grabouw and hangs sullen over Gordon's Bay. Foxfire flits along the Strand beach in the ruddy light like jackals before a lion. The land around me holds its breath. Hot foetid air roars towards APE TOWN. This is what Hell is —waking up.

Aeons roll round and, when they stop, I am older —much older. I feel my mother speeding away, faster and faster, glowing, blazing, expanding with ecstatic light too fervid for luvving eyes. There's life in the old girl yet. I feel it all around me in the air, in the fire, in the agonised earth. I see angels where I used to see spaces, but not wearing curls and frilly nightdresses. My angels' lion faces are ringed with fire and their wings are ardent flame. Their pugmarks are around my heart. They soar incandescent in the face of luvandwar and the word that roars out of their furnace hearts is not 'reconciliation'. It is resurrection. Lightning claws the sky open. The hidden stars fall down as icy meteors of rain. The lights go on in Macassar Street. And I am as cold and wet as the newborn day.

The sun is rising on the morning after the purging of my heart. Sacred ibises will fly above the arum lily vlei. The Helderberg's scars will be greened with ashes and syringa blossoms will fall like stars. The radio tells me I am a Missing Person too. I switch it off. I want to hear the guinea fowl chuckle and the rain fall. I shake the cardboard box out on the stoep and watch the ashes melt into the rain.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARGARET DAYMOND is Professor in English Studies at the University of Natal, Durban. Her publications focus on women's narratives and questions of gender, feminist theory and narratology. She is a founder editor of *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, and her recent books are *South African Feminisms: Writing Theory and Criticism, 1990–1994* (New York: Garland Press, 1996) and an edition of Lauretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (New York: Feminist Press, 1999). She has published numerous articles in her field, and is one of the editors of the forthcoming volume *Women Writing Africa: Southern Africa* (New York: Feminist Press, 2003).

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P.G. DU PLESSIS grew up in a small town in the former Orange Free State Province of South Africa. He has a PhD from the University of Pretoria (on the use of allusions in literature), was a senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand and later Director of Research of the National Research Council. For a number of years P.G. was editor of a daily newspaper before turning to full-time writing and film-making. His dramas have received many prestigious literary awards and he has also written more than 200 short stories, a novel (in English), numerous television scripts, 9 scripts for feature films (mostly in Afrikaans but also in English), and has acted as host for several television chat series.

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LUCY GRAHAM completed an MA in English literature on 'The Use of the Female Voice in Three Novels by J.M. Coetzee' at Rhodes University in 1996. Since then she has lectured at Vista University and at the University of the Transkei. She was awarded South Africa's Flanagan Scholarship for women, and a Commonwealth Scholarship, and is currently reading for a D.Phil. at the University of Oxford on 'Rape in South African Literature: Segregation, Apartheid and After'.

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MARGARET HANZIMANOLIS has published poems and translations of poetry by Argentinian *modernista* poet Alfonsina Storni in literary journals in the U.S. Margaret was a visiting Lecturer in the English Department at the University of Transkei (UNITRA), Umtata, South Africa in 1998 and 1999, in a program funded by an international educational foundation, IFESH. Currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cape Town, her work focuses on tropes of plenitude and scarcity in southern African pre- and early colonial narratives.

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ROSE RICHARDS was born in Johannesburg, SA and is currently living in the Western Cape. She studied literature at the University of the Witwatersrand and is now teaching writing skills at University of Stellenbosch. Her first great love is writing, which she has been doing since childhood. At work, her enthusiasm is helping writers grow and develop. At play, she experiments with creative writing — which is her enduring fascination. Short stories and imaginary worlds have been her primary focus so far. Rose's work has previously appeared in the South African arts journals, *New Contrast* and *ImPrint*. She describes the impetus behind

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ELAINE YOUNG is a junior lecturer in the program of English Studies at the University of Natal, Durban. In 2000 she completed an MA on the concept of nationhood in post-apartheid South African fiction and has published articles on South African writers Ivan Vladislavic and Achmat Dangor. Her research interests include the notion of 'a common South African story' in contemporary South African fiction, and the relationship between Outcomes-Based Education and the tertiary education sector in South Africa. She currently teaches courses on English language, popular fiction and Outcomes-Based Education.

KUNAPIPI

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ARTICLES

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Achmat Dangor in interview with Elaine Young
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'Fikile Mlotshwa, a comforter for hearings in the Johannesburg area, 29 May 1997' (Photograph by Jillian Edelstein)

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